

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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GREAT EXPECTATIONS.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

CHAPTER XXV.

BENTLEY DRUMMLE, who was so sulky a fellow that he even took up a book as if its writer had done him an injury, did not take up an acquaintance in a more agreeable spirit. Heavy in figure, movement, and comprehension—in the sluggish complexion of his face, and in the large awkward tongue that seemed to loll about in his mouth as he himself lolled about in a room—he was idle, proud, niggardly, reserved, and suspicious. He came of rich people down in Somersetshire, who had nursed this combination of qualities until they made the discovery that it was just of age and a blockhead. Thus Bentley Drummle had come to Mr. Pocket when he was a head taller than that gentleman, and half a dozen heads thicker than most gentlemen.

Startop had been spoiled by a weak mother and kept at home when he ought to have been at school, but he was devotedly attached to her, and admired her beyond measure. He had a woman's delicacy of feature, and was—"as you may see, though you never saw her," said Herbert to me—exactly like his mother. It was but natural that I should take to him much more kindly than to Drummle, and that even in the earliest evenings of our boating, he and I should pull homeward abreast of one another, conversing from boat to boat, while Bentley Drummle came up in our wake alone, under the overhanging banks and among the rushes. He would always creep in-shore like some uncomfortable amphibious creature, even when the tide would have sent him fast upon his way; and I always think of him as coming after us in the dark or by the back-water, when our own two boats were breaking the sunset or the moonlight in mid-stream.

Herbert was my intimate companion and friend. I presented him with a half-share in my boat, which was the occasion of his often coming down to Hammersmith; and my possession of a half-share in his chambers often took me up to London. We used to walk between the two places at all hours. I have an affection for the road yet (though it is not so pleasant a road as it was then), formed in the impressibility of untried youth and hope.

When I had been in Mr. Pocket's family a month or two, Mr. and Mrs. Camilla turned up. Camilla was Mr. Pocket's sister. Georgiana, whom I had seen at Miss Havisham's on the same occasion, also turned up. She was a cousin—an indigestive single woman, who called her rigidity religion, and her liver love. These people hated me with the hatred of cupidity and disappointment. As a matter of course, they fawned upon me in my prosperity with the basest meanness. Towards Mr. Pocket, as a grown-up infant with no notion of his own interests, they showed the complacent forbearance I had heard them express. Mrs. Pocket they held in contempt; but they allowed the poor soul to have been heavily disappointed in life, because that shed a feeble reflected light upon themselves.

These were the surroundings among which I settled down, and applied myself to my education. I soon contracted expensive habits, and began to spend an amount of money that within a few short months I should have thought almost fabulous, but through good and evil I stuck to my books. There was no other merit in this, than my having sense enough to feel my deficiencies. Between Mr. Pocket and Herbert I got on fast; and, with one or the other always at my elbow to give me the start I wanted, and clear obstructions out of my road, I must have been as great a dolt as Drummle if I had done less.

I had not seen Mr. Wemmick for some weeks, when I thought I would write him a note and propose to go home with him on a certain evening. He replied that it would give him much pleasure, and that he would expect me at the office at six o'clock. Thither I went, and there I found him, putting the key of his safe down his back as the clock struck.

"Did you think of walking down to Walworth?" said he.

"Certainly," said I, "if you approve."

"Very much," was Wemmick's reply, "for I have had my legs under the desk all day, and shall be glad to stretch them. Now, I'll tell you what I have got for supper, Mr. Pip. I have got a stewed steak—which is of home preparation—and a cold roast fowl—which is from the cook's-shop. I think it's tender, because the master of the shop was a Juryman in some cases of ours the other day, and we let him down easy. I reminded him of it when I bought the fowl,

and I said, 'Pick us out a good one, old Briton, because if we had chosen to keep you in the box another day or two, we could easily have done it.' He said to that, 'Let me make you a present of the best fowl in the shop.' I let him, of course. As far as it goes, it's property and portable. You don't object to an aged parent, I hope?"

I really thought he was still speaking of the fowl, until he added, "Because I have got an aged parent at my place." I then said what politeness required.

"So, you haven't dined with Mr. Jaggers yet?" he pursued, as we walked along.

"Not yet."

"He told me so this afternoon when he heard you were coming. I expect you'll have an invitation to-morrow. He's going to ask your pals, too. Three of 'em; ain't there?"

Although I was not in the habit of counting Drummle as one of my intimate associates, I answered "Yes."

"Well, he's going to ask the whole gang;" I hardly felt complimented by the word; "and whatever he gives you, he'll give you good. Don't look forward to variety, but you'll have excellence. And there's another rum thing in his house," proceeded Wemmick, after a moment's pause, as if the remark followed on the housekeeper understood; "he never lets a door or window be fastened at night."

"Is he never robbed?"

"That's it!" returned Wemmick. "He says and gives it out publicly, 'I want to see the man who'll rob me.' Lord bless you, I have heard him, a hundred times if I have heard him once, say to regular cracksmen in our front office, 'You know where I live; now, no bolt is ever drawn there; why don't you do a stroke of business with me? Come; can't I tempt you?' Not a man of them, sir, would be bold enough to try it on, for love or money."

"They dread him so much?" said I.

"Dread him," said Wemmick. "I believe you they dread him. Not but what he's artful, even in his defiance of them. No silver, sir. Britannia metal, every spoon."

"So they wouldn't have much," I observed, "even if they——"

"Ah! But he would have much," said Wemmick, cutting me short, "and they know it. He'd have their lives, and the lives of scores of 'em. He'd have all he could get. And it's impossible to say what he couldn't get, if he gave his mind to it."

I was falling into meditation on my guardian's greatness, when Wemmick remarked:

"As to the absence of plate, that's only his natural depth, you know. A river's its natural depth, and he's his natural depth. Look at his watch-chain. That's real enough."

"It's very massive," said I.

"Massive?" repeated Wemmick. "I think so. And his watch is a gold repeater, and worth a hundred pound if it's worth a penny. Mr. Pip, there are about seven hundred thieves in this town who know all about that watch;

there's not a man, a woman, or a child among them, who wouldn't identify the smallest link in that chain, and drop it as if it was red-hot, if inveigled into touching it."

At first with such discourse, and afterwards with conversation of a more general nature, did Mr. Wemmick and I beguile the time and the road, until he gave me to understand that we had arrived in the district of Walworth.

It appeared to be a collection of back lanes, ditches, and little gardens, and to present the aspect of a rather dull retirement. Wemmick's house was a little wooden cottage in the midst of plots of garden, and the top of it was cut out and painted like a battery mounted with guns.

"My own doing," said Wemmick. "Looks pretty; don't it?"

I highly commended it. I think it was the smallest house I ever saw; with the queerest gothic windows (by far the greater part of them sham), and a gothic door, almost too small to get in at.

"That's a real flagstaff, you see," said Wemmick, "and on Sundays I run up a real flag. Then look here. After I have crossed this bridge, I hoist it up—so—and cut off the communication."

The bridge was a plank, and it crossed a chasm about four feet wide and two deep. But it was very pleasant to see the pride with which he hoisted it up and made it fast; smiling as he did so, with a relish and not merely mechanically.

"At nine o'clock every night, Greenwich time," said Wemmick, "the gun fires. There he is, you see! And when you hear him go, I think you'll say he's a Stinger."

The piece of ordnance referred to, was mounted in a separate fortress, constructed of lattice-work. It was protected from the weather by an ingenious little tarpaulin contrivance in the nature of an umbrella.

"Then, at the back," said Wemmick, "out of sight, so as not to impede the idea of fortifications—for it's a principle with me, if you have an idea, carry it out and keep it up; I don't know whether that's your opinion——"

I said, decidedly.

"At the back, there's a pig, and there are fowls and rabbits; then I knock together my own little frame, you see, and grow cucumbers; and you'll judge at supper what sort of a salad I can raise. So, sir," said Wemmick, smiling again, but seriously too as he shook his head, "if you can suppose the little place besieged, it would hold out a devil of a time in point of provisions."

Then he conducted me to a bower about a dozen yards off, but which was approached by such ingenious twists of path that it took quite a long time to get at; and in this retreat our glasses were already set forth. Our punch was cooling in an ornamental lake, on whose margin the bower was raised. This piece of water (with an island in the middle which might have been the salad for supper) was of a circular

form, and he had constructed a fountain in it, which, when you set a little mill going and took a cork out of a pipe, played to that powerful extent that it made the back of your hand quite wet.

"I am my own engineer, and my own carpenter, and my own plumber, and my own gardener, and my own Jack of all Trades," said Wemmick, in acknowledging my compliments. "Well; it's a good thing, you know. It brushes the Newgate cobwebs away, and pleases the Aged. You wouldn't mind being at once introduced to the Aged, would you? It wouldn't put you out?"

I expressed the readiness I felt, and we went into the Castle. There we found, sitting by a fire, a very old man in a flannel coat: clean, cheerful, comfortable, and well cared for, but intensely deaf.

"Well aged parent," said Wemmick, shaking hands with him in a cordial and jocose way, "how am you?"

"All right, John; all right!" replied the old man.

"Here's Mr. Pip, aged parent," said Wemmick, "and I wish you could hear his name. Nod away at him, Mr. Pip; that's what he likes. Nod away at him, if you please, like winking!"

"This is a fine place of my son's, sir," cried the old man, while I nodded as hard as I possibly could. "This is a pretty pleasure-ground, sir. This spot and these beautiful works upon it ought to be kept together by the Nation, after my son's time, for the people's enjoyment."

"You're as proud of it as Punch; ain't you, Aged?" said Wemmick, contemplating the old man with his hard face really softened; "there's a nod for you;" giving him a tremendous one; "there's another for you;" giving him a still more tremendous one; "you like that, don't you? If you're not tired, Mr. Pip—though I know it's tiring to strangers—will you tip him one more? You can't think how it pleases him."

I tipped him several more, and he was in great spirits. We left him bestirring himself to feed the fowls, and we sat down to our punch in the arbour; where Wemmick told me as he smoked a pipe that it had taken him a good many years to bring the property up to its present pitch of perfection.

"Is it your own, Mr. Wemmick?"

"Oh yes," said Wemmick, "I have got hold of it, a bit at a time. It's a freehold, by George!"

"Is it, indeed? I hope Mr. Jaggers admires it?"

"Never seen it," said Wemmick. "Never heard of it. Never seen the Aged. Never heard of him. No; the office is one thing, and private life is another. When I go into the office, I leave the Castle behind me, and when I come into the Castle, I leave the office behind me. If it's not in any way disagreeable to you, you'll oblige me by doing the same. I don't wish it professionally spoken about."

Of course I felt my good faith involved in the

observance of his request. The punch being very nice, we sat there drinking it and talking, until it was almost nine o'clock. "Getting near gun-fire," said Wemmick then, as he laid down his pipe; "it's the Aged's treat."

Proceeding into the Castle again, we found the Aged heating the poker, with expectant eyes, as a preliminary to the performance of this great nightly ceremony. Wemmick stood with his watch in his hand, until the moment was come for him to take the red-hot poker from the Aged, and repair to the battery. He took it, and went out, and presently the Stinger went off with a Bang that shook the crazy little box of a cottage as if it must fall to pieces, and made every glass and teacup in it ring. Upon this, the Aged—who I believe would have been blown out of his arm-chair but for holding on by the elbows—cried out exultingly, "He's fired! I heard him!" and I nodded at the old gentleman until it is no figure of speech to declare that I absolutely could not see him.

The interval between that time and supper Wemmick devoted to showing me his collection of curiosities. They were mostly of a felonious character; comprising the pen with which a celebrated forgery had been committed, a distinguished razor or two, some locks of hair, and several manuscript confessions written under condemnation—upon which Mr. Wemmick set particular value as being, to use his own words, "every one of 'em Lies, sir." These were agreeably dispersed among small specimens of china and glass, various neat trifles made by the proprietor of the museum, and some tobacco-stoppers carved by the Aged. They were all displayed in that chamber of the Castle into which I had been first inducted, and which served, not only as the general sitting-room but as the kitchen too, if I might judge from a saucepan on the hob, and a brazen bison over the fireplace designed for the suspension of a roasting-jack.

There was a neat little girl in attendance, who looked after the Aged in the day. When she had laid the supper-cloth, the bridge was lowered to give her means of egress, and she withdrew for the night. The supper was excellent; and though the Castle was rather subject to dry-rot inasmuch that it tasted like a bad nut, and though the pig might have been farther off, I was heartily pleased with my whole entertainment. Nor was there any drawback on my little turret bedroom, beyond there being such a very thin ceiling between me and the flagstaff that when I lay down on my back in bed, it seemed as if I had to balance that pole on my forehead all night.

Wemmick was up early in the morning, and I am afraid I heard him cleaning my boots. After that, he fell to gardening, and I saw him from my gothic window pretending to employ the Aged, and nodding at him in a most devoted manner. Our breakfast was as good as the supper, and at half-past eight precisely we started for Little Britain. By degrees, Wemmick got dryer and harder as we went along,

and his mouth tightened into a post-office again. At last, when we got to his place of business and he pulled out his key from his coat-collar, he looked as unconscious of his Walworth property as if the Castle and the drawbridge and the arbour and the lake and the fountain and the Aged, had all been blown into space together by the last discharge of the Stinger.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It fell out, as Wemmick had told me it would, that I had an early opportunity of comparing my guardian's establishment with that of his cashier and clerk. My guardian was in his room, washing his hands with his scented soap, when I went into the office from Walworth; and he called me to him, and gave me the invitation for myself and friends which Wemmick had prepared me to receive. "No ceremony," he stipulated, "and no dinner dress, and say to-morrow." I asked him where we should come to (for I had no idea where he lived), and I believe it was in his general objection to make anything like an admission, that he replied, "Come here, and I'll take you home with me." I embrace this opportunity of remarking that he washed his clients off, as if he were a surgeon or a dentist. He had a closet in his room, fitted up for the purpose, which smelt of the scented soap like a perfumer's shop. It had an unusually large jack-towel on a roller inside the door, and he would wash his hands, and wipe them and dry them all over this towel, whenever he came in from a police-court or dismissed a client from his room. When I and my friends repaired to him at six o'clock next day, he seemed to have been engaged on a case of a darker complexion than usual, for we found him with his head butted into this closet, not only washing his hands, but laving his face and gargling his throat. And even when he had done all that, and had gone all round the jack-towel, he took out his penknife and scraped the case out of his nails before he put his coat on.

There were some people slinking about as usual when we passed out into the street who were evidently anxious to speak with him; but there was something so conclusive in the halo of scented soap which encircled his presence, that they gave it up for that day. As we walked along westward, he was recognised ever and again by some face in the crowd of the streets, and whenever that happened he talked louder to me; but he never otherwise recognised anybody, or took notice that anybody recognised him.

He conducted us to Gerard-street, Soho, to a house on the south side of that street. Rather a stately house of its kind, but dolefully in want of painting, and with dirty windows. He took out his key and opened the door, and we all went into a stone hall, bare, gloomy, and little used. So, up a dark brown staircase into a series of three dark brown rooms on the first floor. There were carved garlands on the panelled walls, and as he stood among them giving us welcome, I know what kind of loops I thought they looked like.

Dinner was laid in the best of these rooms; the second was his dressing-room; the third his bedroom. He told us that he held the whole house, but rarely used more of it than we saw. The table was comfortably laid—no silver in the service, of course—and at the side of his chair was a capacious dumb-waiter, with a variety of bottles and decanters on it, and four dishes of fruit for dessert. I noticed throughout, that he kept everything under his own hand, and distributed everything himself.

There was a bookcase in the room; I saw, from the backs of the books, that they were about evidence, criminal law, criminal biography, trials, acts of parliament, and such things. The furniture was all very solid and good, like his watch-chain. It had an official look, however, and there was nothing merely ornamental to be seen. In a corner, was a little table of papers with a shaded lamp: so that he seemed to bring the office home with him in that respect too, and to wheel it out of an evening and fall to work.

As he had scarcely seen my three companions until now—for he and I had walked together—he stood on the hearth-rug, after ringing the bell, and took a searching look at them. To my surprise, he seemed at once to be principally if not solely interested in Drummle.

"Pip," said he, putting his large hand on my shoulder and moving me to the window, "I don't know one from the other. Who's the Spider?"

"The spider?" said I.

"The blotchy, sprawly, sulky fellow."

"That's Bentley Drummle," I replied; "the one with the delicate face is Startop."

Not making the least account of "the one with the delicate face," he returned. "Bentley Drummle is his name, is it? I like the look of that fellow."

He immediately began to talk to Drummle: not at all deterred by his replying in his heavy reticent way, but apparently led on by it to screw discourse out of him. I was looking at the two, when there came between me and them, the housekeeper, with the first dish for the table.

She was a woman of about forty, I supposed—but I may have thought her older than she was, as it is the manner of youth to do. Rather tall, of a lithe nimble figure, extremely pale, with large faded-blue eyes, and a quantity of streaming hair. I cannot say whether any diseased affection of the heart caused her lips to be parted as if she were panting, and her face to bear a curious expression of suddenness and flutter; but I know that I had been to see Macbeth at the theatre, a night or two before, and that her face looked to me as if it were all disturbed by fiery air, like the faces I had seen rise out of the Witches' caldron.

She set the dish on, touched my guardian quietly on the arm with a finger to notify that dinner was ready, and vanished. We took our seats at the round table, and my guardian kept Drummle on one side of him, while Startop sat

on the other. It was a noble dish of fish that the housekeeper had put on table, and we had a joint of equally choice mutton afterwards, and then an equally choice bird. Sauces, wines, all the accessories we wanted, and all of the best, were given out by our host from his dumb-waiter; and when they had made the circuit of the table, he always put them back again. Similarly, he dealt us clean plates and knives and forks, for each course, and dropped those just disused into two baskets on the ground by his chair. No other attendant than the housekeeper appeared. She set on every dish; and I always saw in her face, a face rising out of the caldron. Years afterwards, I made a dreadful likeness of that woman, by causing a face that had no other natural resemblance to it than it derived from flowing hair, to pass behind a bowl of flaming spirits in a dark room.

Induced to take particular notice of the housekeeper, both by her own striking appearance and by Wemmick's preparation, I observed that whenever she was in the room, she kept her eyes attentively on my guardian, and that she would remove her hands from any dish she put before him, hesitatingly, as if she dreaded his calling her back, and wanted him to speak when she was nigh, if he had anything to say. I fancied that I could detect in his manner a consciousness of this, and a purpose of always holding her in suspense.

Dinner went off gaily, and, although my guardian seemed to follow rather than originate subjects, I knew that he wrenched the weakest part of our dispositions out of us. For myself, I found that I was expressing my tendency to lavish expenditure, and to patronise Herbert, and to boast of my great prospects, before I quite knew that I had opened my lips. It was so with all of us, but with no one more than Drummle: the development of whose inclination to gird in a grudging and suspicious way at the rest, was screwed out of him before the fish was taken off.

It was not then, but when we had got to the cheese, that our conversation turned upon our rowing feats, and that Drummle was rallied for coming up behind of a night in that slow amphibious way of his. Drummle upon this, informed our host that he much preferred our room to our company, and that as to skill he was more than our master, and that as to strength he could scatter us like chaff. By some invisible agency, my guardian wound him up to a pitch little short of ferocity about this trifle; and he fell to baring and spanning his arm to show how muscular it was, and we all fell to baring and spanning our arms in a ridiculous manner.

Now, the housekeeper was at that time clearing the table; my guardian, taking no heed of her, but with the side of his face turned from her, was leaning back in his chair biting the side of his forefinger and showing an interest in Drummle, that, to me, was quite inexplicable. Suddenly, he clapped his large hand on the housekeeper's, like a trap, as she stretched it across

the table. So suddenly and smartly did he do this, that we all stopped in our foolish contention.

"If you talk of strength," said Mr. Jaggers, "I'll show you a wrist. Molly, let them see your wrist."

Her entrapped hand was on the table, but she had already put her other hand behind her waist. "Master," she said, in a low voice, with her eyes attentively and entreatingly fixed upon him. "Don't!"

"I'll show you a wrist," repeated Mr. Jaggers, with an immovable determination to show it. "Molly, let them see your wrist."

"Master," she again murmured. "Please!"

"Molly," said Mr. Jaggers, not looking at her, but obstinately looking at the opposite side of the room, "let them see *both* your wrists. Show them. Come!"

He took his hand from hers, and turned that wrist up on the table. She brought her other hand from behind her, and held the two out side by side. The last wrist was much disfigured—deeply scarred and scarred across and across. When she held her hands out, she took her eyes from Mr. Jaggers, and turned them watchfully on every one of the rest of us in succession.

"There's power here," said Mr. Jaggers, coolly tracing out the sinews with his forefinger. "Very few men have the power of wrist that this woman has. It's remarkable what mere force of grip there is in these hands. I have had occasion to notice many hands; but I never saw stronger in that respect, man's or woman's, than these."

While he said these words in a leisurely critical style, she continued to look at every one of us in regular succession as we sat. The moment he ceased, she looked at him again. "That'll do, Molly," said Mr. Jaggers, giving her a slight nod; "you have been admired, and can go." She withdrew her hands and went out of the room, and Mr. Jaggers, putting the decanters on from his dumb-waiter, filled his glass and passed round the wine.

"At half-past nine, gentlemen," said he, "we must break up. Pray make the best use of your time. I am glad to see you all. Mr. Drummle, I drink to you."

If his object in singling out Drummle were to bring him out still more, it perfectly succeeded. In a sulky triumph, Drummle showed his morose depreciation of the rest of us, in a more and more offensive degree until he became downright intolerable. Through all his stages, Mr. Jaggers followed him with the same strange interest. He actually seemed to serve as a zest to Mr. Jaggers's wine.

In our boyish way of discretion I dare say we took too much to drink, and I know we talked too much. We became particularly hot upon some boorish sneer of Drummle's, to the effect that we were too free with our money. It led to my remarking, with more zeal than discretion, that it came with a bad grace from him, to whom Startop had lent money in my presence, but a week or so before.

"Well," retorted Drummle: "he'll be paid."

"I don't mean to imply that he won't," said I, "but it might make you hold your tongue about us and our money, I should think."

"You should think!" retorted Drummle. "Oh Lord!"

"I dare say," I went on, meaning to be very severe, "that you wouldn't lend money to any of us, if we wanted it."

"You are right," said Drummle. "I wouldn't lend one of you a sixpence. I wouldn't lend anybody a sixpence."

"Rather mean to borrow under those circumstances, I should say."

"You should say," repeated Drummle. "Oh Lord!"

This was so very aggravating—the more especially, as I found myself making no way against his surly obtuseness—that I said, disregarding Herbert's efforts to check me:

"Come, Mr. Drummle, since we are on the subject, I'll tell you what passed between Herbert here and me, when you borrowed that money."

"I don't want to know what passed between Herbert there and you," growled Drummle. And I think he added in a lower growl, that we might both go to the devil and shake ourselves.

"I'll tell you, however," said I, "whether you want to know or not. We said that as you put it in your pocket very glad to get it, you seemed to be immensely amused at his being so weak as to lend it."

Drummle laughed outright, and sat laughing in our faces, with his hands in his pockets and his round shoulders raised: plainly signifying that it was quite true, and that he despised us as asses all.

Hereupon, Startop took him in hand, though with a much better grace than I had shown, and exhorted him to be a little more agreeable. Startop, being a lively bright young fellow, and Drummle being the exact opposite, the latter was always disposed to resent him as a direct personal affront. He now retorted in a coarse lumpish way, and Startop tried to turn the discussion aside with some small pleasantry that made us all laugh. Resenting this little success more than anything, Drummle without any threat or warning pulled his hands out of his pockets, dropped his round shoulders, swore, took up a large glass, and would have flung it at his adversary's head, but for our entertainer's dexterously seizing it at the instant when it was raised for that purpose.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Jaggers, deliberately putting down the glass, and hauling out his gold repeater by its massive chain, "I am exceedingly sorry to announce that it's half-past nine."

On this hint we all rose to depart. Before we got to the street door, Startop was cheerily calling Drummle "old boy," as if nothing had happened. But the old boy was so far from responding, that he would not even walk to Hanmersmith on the same side of the way; so, Herbert and I, who remained in town, saw them going down the street on opposite sides; Startop leading, and Drummle lagging behind in

the shadow of the houses, much as he was wont to follow in his boat.

As the door was not yet shut, I thought I would leave Herbert there for a moment, and run up-stairs again to say a word to my guardian. I found him in his dressing-room surrounded by his stock of boots, already hard at it, washing his hands of us.

I told him that I had come up again, to say how sorry I was that anything disagreeable should have occurred, and that I hoped he would not blame me much.

"Pooh!" said he, sluicing his face, and speaking through the water-drops; "it's nothing, Pip. I like that Spider though."

He had turned towards me now, and was shaking his head, and blowing, and towelling himself.

"I am glad you like him, sir," said I—"but I don't."

"No, no," my guardian assented, "don't have too much to do with him. Keep as clear of him as you can. But I like the fellow, Pip; he is one of the true sort. Why, if I was a fortune-teller——"

Looking out of the towel, he caught my eye.

"But I am not a fortune-teller," he said, letting his head drop into a festoon of towel, and towelling away at his two ears. "You know what I am, don't you? Good night, Pip."

"Good night, sir."

In about a month after that, the Spider's time with Mr. Pocket was up for good, and, to the great relief of all the house but Mrs. Pocket, he went home to the family hole.

ERRATUM. In No. 97, Chapter xxii. of Great Expectations, page 481, second column, line 15 from the bottom, the word "nephew" is printed instead of "cousin." The line should read, "My father is Miss Havisham's cousin."

POETS AT FAULT.

Of all the regular phenomena of Nature, hardly one is so beautiful and solemn, or so deeply interesting to man, as the dawn of light in the early morning. It is interesting to the heart of man, not only because it is the natural call to renewed labour, but because it is the return to our hemisphere of the very source of life and fertility. How grand the thought that that golden centre of light and heat, thousands of miles away in the measureless amplitude of heaven, shines unceasingly for man; that when for a brief space he quits our sight, it is to vivify our human kindred at the antipodes, leaving to us shadows and sleep and dreams; that this globe of ours is perpetually basking in some portion of its surface, in the splendour of the solar sphere, gliding smoothly, noiselessly, and unrestingly, out of zones of brightness into zones of night, out of darkness into day. At no moment are we made so sensible of this sublime ordination as at the time of dawn; and no operation of Providence is so suggestive of poetry as this daily repetition of one of the chief creative acts.

Yet it would seem that the greatest of our English poets have not been fully impressed

with this incentive to the highest exercise of the descriptive part of their art. Passages about the dawn are to be found in abundance in all poets—some of them, passages of great beauty; but, with a few exceptions, they are not equal to the mingled grandeur and tenderness of the occasion. It is to be suspected that scholasticism has had a great deal to do with the defect among our old writers. They too often thought of what the classics said on the subject, instead of simply asking their own hearts what the thing itself said to them. They could not get rid of Aurora and Phœbus and Tithonus—very accomplished, well-behaved persons, no doubt, and very pretty company at the right season; but, in front of the mighty verities of Nature, somewhat tawdry and impertinent. For the same reason, our early poets harped upon a series of common-places about "sprinkling roses," "hurling golden beams through the air," "stepping across the eastern threshold;" "the gate of heaven," "the coursers of the sun," "the chariot of Sol," and so forth. It is wonderful to find how constantly these set figures are repeated, not only by one author, but by many authors. The members of the poetical guild seem to have accepted such phrases as a kind of legal tender or current coin of the realm, and to have regarded them as all-sufficient; though in truth they are violent metaphors, and thrust out of sight that which is a great deal finer, because simple and true.

Let us illustrate our meaning by quoting a well-known passage from Spenser's *Faery Queene*—beautiful in itself, but not of the highest kind of beauty:

At last, the golden Oriental gate
Of greatest heaven 'gan to open faire,
And Phœbus, fresh as bridegroom to his mate,
Came dancing forth, shaking his dewy haire,
And hurld his glistering beames through gloomy aire.

(Book I. c. 5.)

Or take another passage from the same poem, still more exquisite, but of the like figurative kind, and manifestly based rather upon the poet's reading than upon his observation and perception:

The joyous day 'gan early to appear,
And fayre Aurora from the dewy bed
Of aged Tithone 'gan herself to reare,
With rosy cheekes, for shame as blushing red:
Her golden locks for haste were loosely shed
About her eares, when Una her did marke
Clymbe to her charet, all with flowers spread,
From heaven high to chase the cheerlesse darke:
With merry note her lowd salutes the mounting lark.

(Book I. c. 11.)

Assuredly, no one who has any sense of poetry will dispute for a moment the loveliness of that stanza, considered as a picture from the Greek mythology, or as a piece of music. But it is not a description of morning, as morning shows itself to the eyes of one who, leaving his books behind him, and the Greek mythology with them, goes forth into the still clear air of dawn, and looks towards the eastern heavens. He will see no Aurora and no

Tithonus; no rosy cheeks or golden locks; no chariots, and no horses of the sun. But he will behold a mighty revelation of Eternal power, harmony, and beauty, before which all mythologies turn pale. Far be it from us to deny the grace and human dignity (human, but bordering on the Divine, as humanity at its highest always does) to be found in the old religion of the Hellenes. Still, the truth of Nature is to be preferred.

That metaphor with respect to the day "dancing forth" was a very favourite one, and was often transferred to the morning star. Thus, Milton writes, in his *Song on May Morning*:

Now the bright morning star, day's harbinger,
Comes dancing from the East.

And Giles Fletcher, in *Christ's Victory and Triumph*, has an exquisite line with reference to the same fancy:

A star comes dancing up the Orient.

But, after all, it is mere fancy, answering to no truth whatever. There is nothing in the smallest degree analogous to "dancing" in that bright still glorious planet; and, joyful and vigorous as the image is, it is to be regretted when it stands in the way of the far nobler fact. If we turn to the greatest of poets—to Shakespeare himself—we do not find matters much improved. Let us see what the Friar in *Romeo and Juliet* has to say about the dawn, with which he professes to be familiar:

The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night,
Checking the eastern clouds with streaks of light;
And flecked darkness like a drunkard reels
From forth day's pathway, made by Titan's wheels.

Here the second line is the best, because it is the truest. The image by which the darkness is represented reeling like a drunkard out of the pathway of the light, is extravagant and coarse; and the allusion to "Titan's wheels" is the old schoolboy common-place, dragged in to make out the line. The gradual, calm, orderly fading away of the darkness before the advancing light, is far too beautiful and holy a thing to be likened to the staggering of a belated reveller before the coming lanterns of the watch; and "Titan's wheels" really give the mind no definite idea of any sort. Romeo himself does better:

Look, love, what envious streaks

Do lace the severing clouds in yonder East!
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tip-toe on the misty mountain tops.

In this passage, as in the former, that part which is most truthful is most poetical. The "severing clouds" and "the misty mountain tops" are phrases full of the spirit of morning; but why should day be made a person? and why should he stand tip-toe? Let it be understood that this is not an objection to fancy (which is part of the very life of poetry), but to metaphors which are incongruous and impertinent—which represent nothing but the poet's reading, and cannot be resolved into the plain truth of things. In the like manner, a delicious line in Milton's *Lycidas* is injured:

While the still morn went out with sandals grey.

"The still morn" is perfection; the greyness, also, is a veritable touch under certain cloudy conditions; but why must the morn have "sandals"? Of course, Milton's object was to give you the idea of a pilgrim issuing forth on his pious journey; but is not the coming of the divine mystery of light worth a whole army of pilgrims—immeasurably more interesting and more sacred?

A small poet in comparison with Milton—Marston, the dramatist—has two lines in one of his plays which say exactly what is wanted, and no more:

Is not yon gleam the shuddering morn, that flakes
With silver tincture the east verge of heaven?
—though the same poet, in another place, falls
back upon the old impersonations:

See! the dapple coursers of the morn
Beat up the light with their bright silver hoofs,
And chase it through the sky.

The image here introduced is very pretty in itself; but it is grossly inapplicable to the thing which it professes to describe. Milton's "Aurora's fan" is an excessive instance of bad taste; but his phrase, "the dawning hills," is equally fine and true. And Shakespeare, in *Hamlet*, strikes off a circumstance incidental to morning, in a passage of noble simplicity and exquisite modulation:

The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
And gins to pale his uneffectual fire.

Very faithful also, to a certain kind of dawn, is that bit in *Much Ado about Nothing*:

And look! the gentle day

Dapples the drowsy East with spots of grey.
—a figure which Milton has imitated in *L'Allegro*. The passage in the same poem about the newly-risen sun,

Robed in flames and amber light,
is magnificent, but refers to a time subsequent to the dawn—not to the dawn itself. So does that resplendent picture of early morning on the sea, in *Midsummer Night's Dream*; so does the celebrated simile in one of Shakespeare's Sonnets, about the sun "flattering the mountain-tops with sovereign eye;" so does a grand line in *Richard the Second*, in which the ascending luminary is painted as

He fires the proud tops of the eastern pines;
so do the numerous and most fresh and vital descriptions of the matin season in Chaucer. In Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*, however, four lines occur, which, considering the time when they were written, are remarkable for their absence of scholastic adornment:

See! the day begins to break,
And the light shoots like a streak
Of subtle fire. The wind blows cold
While the morning doth unfold.

This passage has been highly commended, and the phrase about the "streak of subtle fire" is unquestionably fine; but who ever saw the morning light "shoot"? The word would be very applicable if applied to the *Aurora Borealis*, which darts out in long sudden javelins of brilliance; but the dawn is remarkable for the

stealthiness of its approach. Is it not to be suspected that Fletcher was thinking of what was most effective, rather than of what was most true?

The best poets of the present century have been more faithful in their pictures of early morning: indeed, it is the distinguishing feature of modern poetry that, with less intellectual power and wealth than the productions of the Shakespearean and Miltonic eras, and less imagination of the creative order, it is more exact in its reflexion of external nature, because it is more free from the despotism of classical models, which sometimes bound down our greatest authors to certain prescribed modes of seeing things, as if a man dared not say a rose was red, or a lily white, unless he had the authority of the schools for so doing. Perhaps there is no description of the coming on of light so perfect as that which Shelley has given us in his little poem, *The Boat on the Serchio*:

The stars burnt out in the pale blue air,
And the thin white moon lay withering there:
To tower, and cavern, and rift, and tree,
The owl and the bat fled drowsily.
Day had kindled the dewy woods,
And the rocks above, and the stream below,
And the vapours in their multitudes,
And the Apennines' shroud of summer snow,
And clothed with light of aery gold
The mists in their eastern caves uproll'd.
Day had awaken'd all things that be,—
The lark and the thrush and the swallow free,
And the milkmaid's song and the mower's scythe,
And the matin bell and the mountain bee.
Fire-flies were quench'd on the dewy corn,
Glow-worms went out on the river's brim,
Like lamps which a student forgets to trim:
The beetle forgot to wind his horn;
The crickets were still in the meadow and hill.

Observe the overmastering truth, and yet the exquisite fancy and imagination, as well as the marvellous melody, of those lines. How immeasurably finer is this simple reliance on the eternal Divinity that is in Nature, than any pomp of imagery derived from the evanescent mythologies of men! How close the observation of facts, and yet how poetical and musical the utterance! How full of space, and exaltation, and skyey splendour, the first section of the passage; how faithful to the sweet, abiding habitudes of man, and beast, and insect, the second! And then—after a few more lines—how solemn and religious (with a change in the measure to mark the change in the poet's mood) is that which follows!

All rose to do the task He set to each
Who shaped us to His ends, and not our own.

Nothing, too, can be more beautiful than two stanzas in Mrs. Browning's *Song of the Morning Star to Lucifer*:

Henceforward, human eyes of lovers be
The only sweetest sight that I shall see,
With tears between the looks raised up to me:

When, having wept all night, at break of day
Above the folded hills they shall survey
My light, a little trembling, in the grey.

To return to the older poets: we deduce from the passages quoted, and from several

others, these four propositions: That they preferred mythology to truth; that they repeated certain common-places with too great readiness; that they represented the dawn as something abrupt, startling, and active, when it is beautifully gradual—nay, almost furtive; and that they spoke of it as jocund, whereas it is sad. Those who have watched through the night, and marked the approach of dawn, know that the light does not “shoot,” but *grows*; that, after a blacker blackness than midnight can produce, the huge overarching dark gets somewhat paler, though by infinitely fine degrees; that by-and-by the blackness relents and softens into intense purplish blue (speaking here of mornings that are cloudless); that this deep blue becomes more luminous every minute, yet with a wonderful tenderness of gradation, as the advancing glory pours into and dilutes it; that presently the blue kindles into glowing sapphire, like delicate coloured glass with a light behind it, which steepens its entire substance in augmenting radiance; that, in the midst of this dreamy suffusion and silence, the keen gold of the morning star hangs dreamy and silent; that there is a progression which is allied to pausing, by reason of its hushed unhurried march; and that finally, as the great wave of the darkness ebbs away in the extremest west, and “the stars burn out in the pale blue air,” all things acquire an aspect of fresh wonder and mystery, as if they were newly created in their own eyes and those of others. And that sight is not “jocund,” but divinely sad: sad with the dumbness and the enigma of the world.

AMERICAN VOLUNTEER FIREMEN.

THE firemen of America are all volunteers. It is the law of the land that every citizen at a certain age, must come and serve for a certain specified duration of time, as either a militiaman or a volunteer. Now, as I believe the militiaman's term of service lasts five years, and a fireman's only three, you may easily imagine, among an itinerant and feverishly restless democratic youth, which is preferred.

Besides, there are many other reasons which I have no doubt contribute to make the fireman's service more popular in America than the militiaman's. In the first place, the former service, though vexatiously frequent in its calls upon its members, is not so restrained and monotonous as that of the militiaman's; and the Americans, as self-conscious freemen, are very jealous of even the smallest and least galling restraint. Secondly, the dress is not so much of the character of a livery—which a true American always detests as a badge of serfdom; it is more loose, careless, and picturesque. Thirdly, the work is at night, when shops are shut and counting-houses closed; lastly, the service is one of stirring danger, and full of that passionate excitement that the American, whose Anglo-Saxon blood the suns of a new continent have long since fired to almost the volcanic warmth of the Indian he displaced, loves, and must have.

I will give my first impressions of the appearance of these volunteer firemen. I had only just landed from the faithful steamer, the *Red Arrow*, that had borne me so well over the churlish Atlantic, where *Notus* and *Auster* and *Boreas* and *Aquila* had blown their worst at me, and was working my way from the Battery and the vast world of warehouses thereunto adjoining, into Broadway.

The new region, of which I was not quite the Columbus, lay before me, with its thin wiry merchants, its sallow-faced and pale dyspeptic clerks, its hairy rowdies, its Californian itinerants, and its staring, wobegone emigrants. A party of these last (palpably Irish) had just jolted past me, seated on their sea-chests, and packed in a slight-built waggon, that bumped over the stones, built in with piles of striped bedding, and jingling bunches of the tin-cans and basins that emigrants use on board ship. Away they jolted into a new world; in a few days they would be shaping pine-logs in a cedar wood of Florida, or lying on beds of hemlock-boughs on the skirt of some vast prairie; the training-ground of nations yet unborn.

Here, glide along the huge crimson omnibus carriages of the street-railroad; those fluttering flags over the conductor's platform, announce a great election-meeting to-night in the City Park. Here come some cotton bales, and here a cart full of oysters—sea fruit new gathered; but now a stir and oscillation in the street crowds. Now rises to the immaculate blue sky that ever smiles on New York, a bray of brass, a clump of cymbals, and the piercing supplication of lifes, and bomb tom cannonades the drum, with expostulating groan.

Ha! there breaks through the black-panted crowd (even the seediest American wears evening dress) gleams of warm scarlet! It is the rifle company of one of the New York Volunteer Firemen Societies. Here they come, four abreast. “*FOUR*,” with no very severe military air of stiff order and mathematical regularity, but with light, gay, swinging step, jaunty, careless, rather defiant freemen, a little self-conscious of display, but braving it out in a manly game-cock way. They are trailing rifles now, the officers swinging round in the wheels with them, glittering sword in hand.

They wear a rude sort of shako covered with oilskin, red flannel shirts, with black silk handkerchiefs, blowing gaily (as to the ends), tied round their throats in jaunty sailor's knots; they are all young men, some quite boys. It is evidently the manner with them to affect recklessness, so as not to appear to be drilled or drummed about to the detriment of their brave democratic freedom uniform. No, they would as soon wear flamingo-plush and bell-hanging shoulder-knots.

They have been over on what the Americans call “a target excursion” to Brooklyn, and have been summoned together by advertisement in the New York Herald. To-morrow, there will be a paragraph about their excellent shooting, the number of bull's-eyes they made, the “clam

chowder" they partook of afterwards, and the "good time" they had generally.

Observe, too, a special American characteristic, the big laughing nigger, "the big buck nigger," as the firemen call him, half fondly, half contemptuously (for these election quarrels do not make the masses look more kindly on the slave), who carries the target riddled into a colander with bullet-holes. There are even popular Yankee songs about

The Dark who 'totes' the target.

The song writer compares him to Pompus Caesar, whom the coloured girls peculiarly admire, and the chorus is, I remember:

They come together
With sword and feather,
Loud trumpets, drums, and hooting,
And with the mark
Bring up the dark
When they go out a shooting.

There is not a red-shirted young democrat in that regiment, I feel sure, who would not shoulder his rifle and go off in dudgeon if any one dared to propose that he should take the place of the "great buck nigger" and tote the target. Democracy has its pride, too, as well as oligarchy: its just pride and its foolish pride.

The perpetual firing of these red-shirted youngsters is not without danger, for it is, like all American sports, practised in a reckless way by lads utterly regardless of life. Only yesterday I read in the Tribune, the great abolitionist paper, a rather frightened complaint from some boatmen, who, while quietly steering up the East river, had their hats perforated with bullets.

These street processions are incessant in New York, and contribute much to the gayness of the street. Whether firemen, or volunteers, or political torch-bearers, they are very arbitrary in their march. They allow no omnibus, or van, or barouche, to break their ranks; and I have often seen all the immense traffic of Broadway (a street that is a mixture of Cheapside and Regent-street) stand still, benumbed, while a band of men, enclosed in a square of rope, dragged by, a shining brass gun or a bran new gleaming fire-engine.

But, after all, it is at night-time that the fireman is really himself, and means something. He lays down the worn-out pen, and shuts up the red-lined ledger. He hurries home from Lime-street, slips on his red shirt and black dress trousers, dons his solid japanned leather helmet bound with brass, and hurries to the guard-room, or the station, if he be on duty.

A gleam of red, just a blush in the sky, eastward—William-street way—among the warehouses; and presently the telegraph begins to work. For, every fire station has its telegraph, and every street has its line of wires, like metallic washing-lines. Jig-jig, tat-tat, goes the indicator: "Fire in William-street, No. 3, Messrs. Harcastle and Co."

Presently the enormous bell, slung for the purpose in a wooden shed in the City Park just at the end of Broadway, begins to swing and roll backward.

In dash the volunteers in their red shirts and helmet—from oyster cellars and half-finished clam soup, from newly-begun games of billiards, from the theatre, from Bourcicault, from Booth, from the mad drollery of the Christy minstrels, from stiff quadrille parties, from gin-slings, from bar-rooms, from sulphurous pistol galleries, from studios, from dissecting-rooms, from half-shuttered shops, from conversazioni and lectures—from everywhere—north, south, east, and west—breathless, hot, eager, daring, shouting, mad. Open fly the folding-doors, out glides the new engine—the special pride of the company—the engine whose excellence many lives have been lost to maintain; "a reg'lar high-bred little stepper" as ever smith's hammer forged. It shines like a new set of cutlery, and is as light as a "spider waggon" or a trotting-gig. It is not the great Juggernaut car of our Sun and Phoenix offices—the enormous house on wheels, made as if purposely cumbrous and eternal—but is a mere light musical snuff-box of steel rods and brass supports, with axes and coils of leather, brass-socketed tubing fastened beneath, and all ready for instant and alert use.

Now, the supernumeraries—the haulers and draggers, who lend a hand at the ropes—pour in from the neighbouring dram-shops or low dancing-rooms, where they remain waiting to earn some dimes by such casualties. A shout—a tiger!

"Hei! hei!! hei!!! hei!!!!" (crescendo), and out at lightning speed dashes the engine, in the direction of the red gleam now widening and sending up the fan-like radiance of a volcano.

Perhaps it is a steam fire-engine. These are entire successes, and will soon be universal among a people quick to march onward at all that is new, if it be but better than the old. Then the fires are lighted, and breathing out ardent smoke, and spitting out trails of fiery cinders; off it dashes.

Now, a roar and crackle, as the quick-tongued flames leap out, red and eager, or lick the black blistered beams—now, hot belches of smoke from shivering windows—now, snaps and smashes of red-hot beams, as the floors fall in—now, down burning stairs, like frightened martyrs running from the stake, rush poor women and children in white trailing night-gowns—now, the mob, like a great exulting many-headed monster, shouts with delight and sympathy—now, race up the fire-engines, the men defying each other in rivalry, as they plant the ladders and fire-escapes. The fire-trumpets roar out stentorian orders—the red shirts fall into line—rock, rock, go the steel bars that force up the water—up leap the men with the hooks and axes—crash, crash, lop, chop, go the axes at the partitions, where the fire smoulders. Now, spirt up in fluid arches, the blue white jets of water, that hiss and splash, and blacken out the spasms of fire; and as every new engine dashes up, the thousands of up-turned faces turn to some new shade of reflected crimson, and the half-broken beams give way at the thunder of their cheers.

The fire lowers, and is all but subdued, though still every now and then a floor gives way with an earthquake crash, and into the still lurid dark air rises a storm of sparks like a hurricane of fire-flies. But suddenly there is a crowding together and whispering of helmeted heads. Brave Seth Johnson is missing; all the hook men and axe men are back but he; all the pumpers are there, and all the loafers are there. He alone is missing.

Caleb Fisher saw him last, shouts the captain to the eager red faces; he was then breaking a third floor back window with his axe. He thinks he is under the last wall that fell. Is there a lad there will not risk his life for Seth? No! or he would be no American, I dare swear.

Hei! hei!! hei!!! hei!!!!

Up they tear through choking smoke, spars, and still dangerous fire, over bridges of half-burnt beams, half-brittle charcoal. They reach the tomb of smoking bricks, they dig as if the life of each were depending on it—hooks, axes, bleeding hands, everything but teeth.

Hei! hei!! hei!!! hei!!!!

Click-shough go the shovels, chick-chick the pickaxes. A shout, a scream of
"Seth!"

He is there, pale and silent, with heaving chest, his breast-bone smashed in, a cold dew oozing from his forehead. Now they bear him to the roaring multitude, their eyes aching and watering with the suffocating gusts of smoke. They lay him pale, in his red shirt, amid the hushed voiceless men in the bruised and scorched helmets. The grave doctor breaks through the crowd. He stoops and feels Seth's pulse. All eyes turn to him. He shakes his head, and makes no other answer. Then the young men take off their helmets and bear home Seth, and some weep, because of his betrothed, and the young men think of her.

Such are the scenes that occur nightly in New York. The special disgrace of the city is the incessant occurrence of incendiary fires. Yet accidental fires are exceedingly numerous, for wood is still (even in New York) the predominant building material, in consequence of the extraordinary cheapness of wood fit for building. The roofs, too, are generally of tin, and not tile or slate, and this burns through very quickly. Moreover, the universal stove (derived from the Dutch, I suppose) occasions a great use of flue pipes, and these are buried among wood, and are, even when embedded in stone, dangerous.

Unfortunately, our Sir John Dean Pauls, our Robsons and Redpaths, our Hudsons and Laurences, have all parallels in America. Between different degrees of putridity and different shades of carrion, it were lost of time to discriminate. We all know what Dr. Johnson said when he compared one scoundrel to a rotten egg, and another to a bad oyster. Fraudulent bankrupts are very numerous in New York where trade rushes on with feverish speed; and the merchant you dine with to-day in a marble palace in the Fifth Avenue, is per-

haps to-morrow chalking the ends of cues in a Bowery billiard saloon. Dishonest adventurers go into trade, merely to get credit, enough to go deeply in debt, then "bust up," and slope for Texas," or a cruise among the Mormons.

The barnable houses of New York present an irresistible temptation to the fraudulent bankrupt who is insured in excess. The second week I was in New York there was a detected case quite in point. A ready-made clothesman in Manhattan-street was taken up for burning down his house. The only witness was a raw but well-intentioned country boy from New Jersey, who had been kept by Vanderput (yes, that was his name) to wait in the shop. He deposed to his master, a Dutch Jew, repeatedly offering him bribes to help burn down the place. This boy, in a good stupid way, blurted out the whole truth. All the clothes had been secretly removed from the shop; there was no doubt about it; he had seen them go off in the cart towards one of the ferries. Nothing had been left but old oilskin coats, and rags dipped in naphtha and turpentine. The case was clearly proved, talked of on 'Change as a sign of trade rottenness for a day or two, and then forgotten.

Once, I was spectator of a New York fire, and, indeed, all but fell a victim to it. It happened after this manner. The fifth day I was in New York, I determined, having seen several of the theatres and attended some election meetings and concerts, that I ought to go to Barnum's—special exhibition of the city, a prominent pile of building, covered by day with pictures of zoological wonders, and by night with starry festoons of lamps. There were the live "sea lions" to attract me, and the relics of Washington, and the "mud fish," and the sea anemones, and the collection of coins, and, above all, the theatre, where they were now playing the Story of Joseph and his Brethren: a mystery play, intended to attract country people who entertain conscientious objections to the profanities of the ordinary drama.

I determined to go, so I threw down the flag of a newspaper—the Olive Branch, a most fiery pro-slavery paper—on the table of the hotel reading-room, tossed off my last dessert-spoonful of brandy-and-ice, and set my face towards Barnum's, it being past eight o'clock. It was a calm, mellow night, and the stars were telegraphing to each other with winking diamond sparks, and forming themselves into sentences in the star language, uninterpreted yet by mortals. Presently the poop lamps of Barnum's hove in sight, and the clash and braying of the brass band in the balcony over his door became audible.

Now, Barnum is as well known in America as the President, and people at New York clubs laugh over his last joke. They delight to relate his different humbugs: his prize photographic exhibition of American beauties, his woolly horse, his sham buffalo hunt, his spurious Washington's nurse, his aged dwarf boy Tom Thumb, his plough drawn by elephants, and other enormities. Besides, Barnum is specially

popular just now, because our English Prince had been to see all the absurdities, and was reported by the Herald to have said:

"And where is Mr. Barnum? I should like to see him; he must be the greatest curiosity of the place!" So, Barnum soon advertises his exhibition as patronised by the Prince of Wales.

I paid my twenty-five cents at the Greenwich Fair-looking door, and entered. Coins hung in the dark are rather baffling. A disguised idiot, labelled,

"WHAT IS IT? WHAT DO YOU CALL IT?" is not attractive; a sea-lion, tepid with gas-light and lolling panting with bloodshot eyes and very sick on a wet slab, one soon has enough of; so up I went, after an hour's stare and ramble with my two hearty Texan friends, Paul and Silas Allen, up to the third floor back of the frail dry house to the theatre.

Two scenes were over, and we had just got to a dreary tableau of the Ishmaelites buying Joseph (Miss Robinson) from his envious and beetle-browed brethren; when, through the open windows at the back, swept in a choking cloud of smoke that gradually widened and widened, filling the theatre and half hiding both Ishmaelites and Jews. The country people, bent on the play (the first many of them had ever seen), grumbled at this, but took no other notice. The stolid Circassian chief, with a pillow-case full of white wool on his head, seated nearly next to me and between his wife and daughter, as spectators (to my infinite astonishment), though themselves part of the exhibition—so seated, I suppose, by Barnum's stern command—coughed and sneezed, but still gazed apathetically on the flesh-coloured legs of Joseph, who was coughingly appealing to his eldest brother. I looked back at the windows, they were getting a deep red, as stained glass; and now quick sparks crackled in, and a resinous smell as of burning deal spread terror amongst us.

Shall I ever forget how every face suddenly whitened (as if by a universal flour-dredger), and how every white face suddenly turned to the narrow distant door, as every creature in the theatre, man, woman, and child, rose, and prepared for a trampling life or death rush!

"Fire! Fire! We shall all be burnt! To the door!" cried five hundred voices at once.

My friends, Paul and Silas, were the bravest of men—they had fought hand-to-hand with bowie-knives; they had battled with the Camanches in Texas, one to six. They did not run—they flew over the benches, and disappeared. The fire was next door, the danger was imminent, for New York houses are card-houses, and burn quickly. I felt, not frightened, but stunned; still, I believe, calm and collected. A German gentleman, rising without leaving his place, got up and bravely stayed the panic. Some two hundred crushed their way out; some hundred and fifty stayed their speed, ashamed of their headlong flight; the rest began to retire slowly, as irrationally comforted as they had been irrationally alarmed.

Again, through the hot smoke, the Spirit of

the Aloe entered, with the ballet of Egyptian maidens. But it would not do; we were all unquiet and restless, for now we could hear the crowd below roar applause as the fire-engines dashed up, and we could hear the crackle and murmur of the flames, and now again the sparks came blowing against the windows. Slowly we began to melt away from the room; mutters of "It's all up with Barnum!" filled the air. The Circassian chief was by no means last to leave; "the Lady with long hair," the Happy Family, were all in the crowd together. There was every chance of the "beautiful angel fish" being fried, and the living alligator being done brown. The tattooed New Zealander bolted into the street to help at the engines. (Between ourselves, he was an Irishman, and the engines were Irish too.) Joseph made tracks in the airy Israelitish dress; the men at the doors shouldered their locked-up tills; the gentleman with the world-renowned "Lightning Calculator" prepared with tears to part from his great invention. In a few minutes I was in the street. The red shirts were swarming there. The black hose was coiling about all the neighbouring streets. Everywhere water was dripping and puddling. The trim brass engines were shining in the flames, that broke in puffs from the house next to Barnum's—a tailor's, I think. Smack! splash! went the water, blacking out the red and yellow wherever it fell. New engines, strong as steel could make them, yet light as gigs, dashed up every minute. The police, in their blue frock-coats and low flat caps, were busy making room for the firemen in the red shirts, and for the last arrivals of engines; and, over all the shouting and the bellowing of the fire-horns, sounded the clamour of the tocsin bells of the neighbouring churches.

Barnum's establishment was saved after a little scorching; and, next morning over my coffee, I read that so many thousand dollars covered the loss by a fire which, thanks to the energy of Numbers 1 and 4 Fire Companies, was extinguished in about an hour and a half.

Two days after I met those companies marching past the Mechanics' Hall, returning from a shooting match. There were the same red shirts, swords, and colandered target, officers, negro standard-bearer, and band. But this time the victors carried their prizes hanging round their necks. I particularly remember one poor rifleman who bore a heavy plated cruet-stand and a teapot which must have gone very near to strangling him. Between these voluntary soldiers and the populace there appeared to be perfect sympathy.

It is only upon certain questions that these firemen or militia are ever mutinous. Such a question came on the carpet during the Prince's visit. One of the regiments (chiefly Irishmen) refused to assist in the public processions to welcome his arrival in New York. This regiment has, I believe, since been disbanded in consequence.

A few days before I visited New Orleans a

dreadful fire had taken place, that burnt down a whole street of cotton warehouses and cotton presses, and emporiums of Southern produce. I saw the ruins when I visited the city, still black and hot, just by the great square where the statue of Henry Clay is, and not far from the Levee, as the shore of the Mississippi is called. As Schiller says, "Red as blood was that night," all the town was in a seethe; the crowd was a piebald of gesticulating black and white faces; the whole sky, from Poydras-street to the furthest bayous leading out to Lake Pontchartrain, was burning crimson; millions of dollars melted in the blaze; the young firemen were roused to the highest pitch of audacity; all the town was in a rattle with the hose carts and the swift engines; the bells rang in every street; the coloured lights flashed about; the telegraph was never still. Through wreaths of smoke; through terrible dangers of falling stones and beams, and avalanches of fire, rushed the brave young men with the ladders, hooks, ropes, and axes. Suddenly, all cries were hushed by a roar as of an earthquake; two vast walls fell and buried at once fifteen of the best young men; the moment's hush was broken by a scream from the survivors who, but five minutes ago, had been all roaring with open mouths, the popular fireman's song of

"Wake up boys, the engine's coming."

The papers, ever since, have used this terrible calamity at New Orleans as an argument for employing paid firemen who are less rash than volunteers, and who are always ready and quite as effective; though, perhaps, not so daring.

THE STATUES.

It was far norland; the great abbey rose,
A huge thought sculptured wild in marble freaks;
On peaked roof and crochet sparked the snows,
And on the carven vultures' wings and beaks.
The tangled pine-trees wrestled with the palm
In the fierce casements' interchanging bloom;
And from the misty aisles, and from the gloom,
Shake mournful voices, echoings of calm.

Under vast canopies, whose cloudy blue
Was fired with fixed stars, three statues slept,
And, bending white above them, two and two,
With arched necks, the torchless angels wept.
Upsprung in clustered reeds the granite stone,
Blown at the top to lilies garlanded,
Round wizard-eyed grotesque and griffin head,
And flutes and timbrels, uttering no moan.

Great were the three: a mailed but casqueless knight,
Plated in armour dimly red with gold,
And frozen beard thick wrinkled, stiff and white
Over his quartered surcoat's blazoned fold.
Stark, at his feet, there crouched a sleeping hound,
And, on the dark base of the tomb, we read:
"Great deeds are living spirits; the great dead
Find sepulchre in earth and ocean's round."

And, by his side, there lay a matron fair,
Her coif blown backward like a crimson flame,
Over a delicate band of golden hair,
And temples tintured with the hues of shame;
With folded wings and eyes that stared the day,
A fettered eagle at her feet did sit;
And, on the windings of the scroll was writ:
"She pleaseth God who careth her own way."

Then turned we where the fairer statue, prone
And sphered in the adoring silences,
With smiles that half incarnadined the stone,
Slept in her more than human loveliness.
Her virgin forehead gleamed from out her hood,
Like to a little moonfleck in the spring,
And all her hair went wildly wavering
Over her shoulders, in dishevelled mood.

A sense of peace, an atmosphere of rest,
Sucked from the heart of autumn, filled the place;
The evening of a planet beaming west,
With all the sinking sun upon its face;
Ungathered childhood to our gazing eyes;
Again the dead dropped blossoms at our doors;
Again at sunset from the western shores;
We heard the tolling bells of paradise.

Beautiful abstraction, at her feet
Crouched not the crimson fanged dog of blood,
Stiff at her soles and blind from sun and aleet,
No carrion eagle in its shackles stood;
But round a little urn of tender hue,
With simplest allegories overwrought,
The daisy and the dumb forget-me-not,
In braided meshes with the violet blew.

And on the smooth cirque of the funeral stone,
Touched with the mellow twilight, here and there,
Along the shining surface, faintly shone
A brief inscription, carved in letters fair:
"God is all love; who loveth best loves God:
Love is the ladder of the patriarch,
Scaling the brink of heaven through the dark,
Its foot the earth, its top God's bright abode!"

We ceased; from galleried round and fretted choir,
And hollow roofs the cisterns of the gloom,
The autumn evening, like a gust of fire,
Rolled mournful splendours on the maiden's tomb.
And, at the fountains of our secret tears,
Throbbing for issue blindest pulses strove;
And in our hearts fell, with that dream of love,
The sad and sweet divinity of years.

OYSTERS.

It is a striking example of the wondrous ingratitude of Man that the things which we are most bound to love and reverence should almost always be treated by us in the scurviest and most shameful manner. It would seem as if people supposed that their neighbours were all like Archbishop Cranmer, whose forgiving nature was such that you had only to do him "a shrewd turn" to make him your friend for ever, so ill do we behave to our greatest benefactors. This mode of proceeding is bad enough, in all conscience, where the objects of it are our own fellow-creatures, with the capacity, and very often the will, to resent our conduct; but its enormity reaches the highest point when those whom we abuse are beings at once so helpless and inoffensive as to be utterly incapable of retaliation.

Looking at it in a moral point of view, this is the state of the case as regards Oysters.

From the days of that traditionally courageous individual (a Native of these isles I imagine, for "like will to like") who first swallowed the "Ostrea edulis," to those of him "who did but yesterday suspire" (that is to say, supped last night in the Haymarket), all the world have

acknowledged, at least by silent rapture, that there is nothing so succulent, so sustaining, or that relishes a pot of Stout or a bottle of Chablis, so much as a well-fed oyster, whether Colchester, Carlingford, or Cancale were the cradle of its earliest existence. But "eaten bread is soon forgotten." The tribute paid to the physical excellence of the illustrious Pecten cannot wipe away the enduring reproach which has been hurled at it of intellectual inferiority. "As stupid as an oyster" is a proverbial expression amongst ourselves; and in France, where they ought to know better, they say, to express the same thing, "C'est une huître à l'écaille." They tell a person whose mental faculties they wish to depreciate, that he "argues like an oyster;" and with all the vivacity which Frenchmen exhibit when their money is at stake, they vex the soul of the player whom they have backed at "écarté," by eagerly informing him that he "plays like an oyster." The Italians, also, in a servile spirit of imitation, similarly insult the Oyster by applying to her the words "babbaceione" and "stupidaccia." Let me hope, when Italy is a perfectly free and united nation, that she will in this respect amend her proverbs.

When I say that the French, above all people, "ought to know better," I refer to the well-known fable of their countryman La Fontaine, who, in his pleasant way, relates that in the adventure of the Rat and the Oyster, it was the long-whiskered rodent that was taken in and not the bearded bivalve, who plainly showed that *he*, at all events, was no fool, when he caught the rat in his yawning trap. Monkeys, it is true, deal with oysters in a somewhat similar fashion, but with a very different result: when they find an oyster gaping, they insert the tip of their tails, and on the valves closing they make for the dry land with all speed, dragging behind them the prize which they soon find a way to get at and devour.

To be done in this manner arises, however, from a simple defect, not so much of understanding as of eyesight; for Nature, who has endowed the animal with most of the appurtenances of a fish—such as mouth, beard, gills, stomach, heart, liver, pulse, veins, and muscles—has cruelly deprived it as well of a head as of the organs of vision and locomotion. As to the fact of the Oyster having no head, that is of little consequence: for Michelet, speaking of certain molluscs which are so furnished, says that many of that family lose their heads with impunity. Their vitality lies in the *viscera*, and these they take the greatest care of. Yet the stepmother-like privation of denying it locomotion, has been made the groundwork of the accusation under which the Oyster labours, of stupidity, as if it would not get out of the dredger's way if it had the means of doing so, with sufficient rapidity. Cuvier tells us of a species of Oyster that is able to move itself by violently opening and shutting its shell; and in Pliny's Natural History, we read as follows: "A man would not think, neither is it likely, that the Oysters in the

sea do heave, and yet upon any noise and sound their manner is to sink down to the bottom. And therefore when as men fish for them in the sea they are as silent as may be." And Pliny justifies this attribute of astuteness by the following remark on the sentient faculty of Oysters: "There is not a living creature throughout the world but hath the sense of feeling, though it have none else; for even Oysters and earth-worms, if a man hurt them, do evidently feel." A later authority, Dr. Carpenter, gives the oyster credit for enough eyesight (without eyes), to be susceptible of the influence of light. They have been observed, he says, to close their shells when the shadow of a boat passes over them.

Observant naturalist as Pliny was, we know a little more than he did about the feelings of Oysters. We have heard—Tilburina (who was herself a victim of the tender passion, and went mad for it in white satin) has told us—that "an Oyster may be crossed in love;" and in the Annual Register for eighteen hundred and two, we find this practical comment on the lady's statement: "The advantage which has resulted from crossing the breed of cattle has induced a like experiment upon Oysters, and an extensive dealer in Kent lately imported several tons of Carlingford and other celebrated Irish Oysters, which he laid down in the beds of the best English natives, about Milton, Faversham, and Whitstable. The effect of this union has greatly exceeded his expectations, the produce being greater than heretofore, and of considerably improved flavour." How far the improvement of the Oyster breed by human agency may bear out the assertion of Tilburina is a question which (as critics say when they are in a fix) I shall not stop to discuss; but while on the subject of the Oyster's amatory propensities, I must advert to a disparaging remark which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Benedict: "Love," says the resolute bachelor, "may transform me to an Oyster; but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an Oyster of me he shall never make me such a fool."

Another lover of celebrity, Robert Burns, desires to emulate the Oyster. "There are only two creatures," he says, "that I would envy—a horse in his wild state, traversing the forests of Asia, and an Oyster on some of the desert shores of Europe: the one has not a wish without enjoyment, the other has neither wish nor fear." Now, although this passage may seem to imply torpidity on the part of the Oyster (unless you suppose her thoroughly blasée), there has not been wanting one profound writer to make it the occasion of taxing the fair mollusc with the sin that o'erthrew the angels. "When," observes a solemn Quarterly Reviewer, while no doubt settling his tremendous wig and stiffening his neck in his starched cravat—"when such a sentiment is breathed by such a being, the lesson is awful; and if pride and ambition were capable of being taught" (by the Wild Horse and the Oyster?), "they might hence learn that a well-regulated mind and controlled passions are to be prized above all the glow of ima-

gination and all the splendour of ambition." Burns did not live long enough to read this jobation, and it is satisfactory to think that it may not yet have penetrated the shell of the Oyster, or who shall declare how it might have marred the sensitive creature's flavour?

The Oyster can also hate—and show its hatred too. Man is by no means the only enemy to the Oyster. Its body serves as food to many marine animals, which have various methods of getting access to it, in spite of its shelly defence; from some of these it can secure itself by closing its valves as soon as it is alarmed; and against others it has a more active means of defence, in the violent expulsion of the water included between them, which will frequently drive off its opponent. Various animals attack it, also, by perforating its shell; and to these also it can offer a passive resistance, by depositing new shelly matter within. So that even this lowly-organised being, commonly regarded as one of the most vegetative of animals, adds our authority for these facts, is provided by its Creator with such means as are necessary for its preservation, and doubtless also for its enjoyment.

Leaving, however, the moral feature of the subject, and bidding adieu to the Oyster's detractors, let us turn to a pleasanter theme, the acknowledged merits of the delicious edible, which is, in fact, the purpose of this disquisition. An eloquent Frenchman has observed: "This much is certain, that the Oyster supplies an aliment which unites all the properties that are most precious for food. Its flesh is sweet, fine, and delicate; it has savour enough to please the taste, not enough to excite or cloy it, or reach that frightful limit of the gastronomer—*too much*! It lends itself, moreover, through a quality peculiar to it, to gastric and intestinal absorption. Mingling easily with the other aliments, and assimilating itself without difficulty with the juices of the stomach, it assists the digestive functions. Excepting bread, there is no alimentary substance that does not at one time or another cause indigestion, but Oysters never!" That is a homage which is justly their due. You may eat them to-day, to-morrow, for ever, and as many of them as you are able. The Oyster's presence in the stomach is hardly perceptible, and yet it satisfies the taste, appeases the appetite, and calms that impatience of the nerves which hunger creates. This is why Oysters are welcomed everywhere, why they enter into cookery of all kinds, whether learned or simple, why they are met with alike on the table of the wealthy and of the poor. They are the *gratia ingulvis* of Horace, in all its sublime modesty, which leaves behind it no regrets, no satiety, no colic, no remorse. When Malherbe says that he knows nothing better than women and melons, it is difficult to understand how the Norman poet omitted Oysters (living, as he did, so near the best fisheries). As for women, there are people with whom they do not always agree (or, which comes to the same thing, who do not agree with them), and I have known more than

one malady caused by indigestible melons; but who ever heard a complaint of that kind made against Oysters? To continue the remark of the writer already cited: "That which constantly pleases in eating Oysters is the fact that while gastric ailments are defied, the mind is neither disquieted nor irritated by fears for the future. One devours them in the full and perfect certainty that health will not in the slightest degree be compromised, were one even to plunge into that abyss which is called satiety. To eat Oysters is, therefore, at once both physically and morally healthful."

What "satiety" is, where Oysters are concerned, it may be difficult to determine. It depends altogether on the capacity of the ostreophagist. Grimod de la Reynière says: "It has been proved by experience that after five or six dozen, oysters cease to be an enjoyment." Brillat-Savarin (in his *Physiologie du Goût*) tells a very different story. In the first place, he observes:—"It was well known that, formerly, a feast of any pretensions usually commenced with oysters, and that there were epicures who did not leave off until they had swallowed a gross; in other words, a dozen dozen. Wishing to know what such a prandial advanced guard weighed, I verified the fact, that the weight of a dozen oysters (including water) was four ounces avoirdupois, and this gives for the whole gross, three pounds. Now, I look upon it as certain, that these persons who did not dine the less heartily after the oysters, would have been completely satiated if they had eaten the same quantity of meat, even had it been chicken." Brillat-Savarin follows up this remark by the following anecdote: "In 1798 I was at Versailles, and I had frequent intercourse with the Sieur Laperte, Registrar of the Tribunal of the Department. He was a great lover of oysters, and complained that he had never eaten enough of them, or, as he said, 'his fill.' I resolved to procure him that satisfaction, and invited him to dine with me next day. He came, and I kept him company up to the thirteenth dozen, that is during more than an hour, for the oyster-opener was not very expert. All the rest of the time I was kept inactive, and as to sit at table without eating is extremely painful, I stopped my guest while in full career. 'My dear sir,' I said to him, 'your destiny is not to have your fill of oysters to-day. Let us dine!' We did dine, and he behaved himself with all the vigour and perseverance of a man breaking a long fast." Monsieur Laperte belonged, without doubt, to the school of the French poet Laines (deceased in Paris in 1710), of whose surprising powers of deglutition the following story is told: One day, after he had been cramming for five or six hours, he rose, and, after a brief pause, resumed his seat to prepare for a new conflict. "Have you not dined?" asked a friend. "Do you think my stomach has any memory?" was the counter-question, with which he fell to.

The counterpart of Monsieur Laperte—so

far as relates to appetite—was to be found in London, some twenty years ago, in the person of the celebrated Dando. He was never known to have eaten his fill of oysters, though he repeatedly made the attempt, and always at the expense of those who could have supplied him, if they would, with an unlimited number. Not until the oyster-opener's arms were wearied—not until his knife was blunted and broken—not until dozen after dozen had disappeared, in company with mounds of bread-and-butter and floods of porter, did the oyster-shop keeper—the Pim, the Quinn, or whoever it might be—discover in the seedy foe to the genus oyster, the insatiable, the impecunious Dando. He ate his oysters with so much relish, he seemed so entirely at home with them, he handled them so completely with the touch of a master, that—for a time at least—self-interested criticism was lost in admiration. The waiters who hurried in with relays, grinned as they passed each other, and swore they had never seen “such a One-er;” the guests, who clamoured to be served, suppressed their clamour to gaze, more or less furtively, on an individual who seemed to be all throat, and with stomach of immeasurable profundity; the fishmonger, from whose stores the oysters were transferred, felt a pleasing sense of dismay at the rapidity with which they vanished—till, suddenly, flashed the thought: “Suppose this should be Dando!” And Dando it always was, ever penniless, impenetrable, cool, and craving, into whose mind the thought of paying had never once entered, even had it been possible, which it never was, for him to have shelled out a single farthing. For Dando to be “had-up” for oyster-eating became the standing police amusement of every week during the season. It was of no use committing Dando to prison, for the treadmill, oakum picking, prison fare itself, however liberal, only aggravated his appetite for oysters; and, after he had sojourned for a week or two in Coldbath Fields or elsewhere, the oyster-shops were the real sufferers. When Ancient Pistol exclaimed that the world was his oyster, he merely typified the tendencies of Dando, to whom everything in existence was, as it were, an oyster, to be always eaten. At last Dando died—of starvation—with his mission unfulfilled. Alexander wept at having no more worlds to conquer, and Dando died because there were no more oyster-shops to victimise. He had succeeded in establishing his fame from Whitechapel to Knightsbridge, from Highgate to Camberwell,—he was everywhere better known than trusted. What could he do, but calmly lay down his head on a dust-heap, and pray for contentment beneath a pile of oyster-shells?

Oysters have been, at all times, a favourite *mangeaille* with every nation, except the Hebrews, to whom, as being without fins or scales, they were forbidden. The Athenians turned their oysters to a very unworthy purpose. When they had eaten the fish—having banqueted, we will suppose, at the expense of some such eminent citizen as Aristides—they

wrote on the shells their vote for his banishment; perhaps, on the plea of his giving bad dinners; possibly stale oysters, than which there is nothing more unpleasant or disappointing, because, when you swallow a bad oyster, you are let in for it without reserve. The Romans, who loved oysters better than the Greeks, and who fed more luxuriously than any other people of antiquity, were the first to plant them out, or “park” them. Pliny (in the 45th chapter of the 9th book of his *Natural History*) thus describes how: “The first that invented stews and pits to keep oysters in, was Sergius Orata, who made such about his house at Baianum, in the days of L. Crassus, that famous orator, before the Marsian’s war. And this the man did not for his belly and to maintain gourmandise, but of a covetous mind for very gain. And by this and such wittic devices, he gathered great revenues; for he it was that invented the hanging baines and pools to bathe in aloft upon the top of an house: and thus, when he had set out his manour-house for the better sale, he would make good merchandize of them, and sell them againe for commoditie and gaine. He was the first man that brought the Lucrine Oysters into name and credit for their excellent taste. In those very daies, but somewhat before Orata, Licinius Marcus devised pools and stews for to keep and feed other fishes, whose example noblemen followed, and did the like after them.” What was done by noble Romans, in the same manner, about “Lampreyes” and “Winkles” does not enter into my subject.

That Pliny was himself an oyster-eater is evident from the following passage: “Albeit I have written already of Oysters, yet methinks I cannot speak sufficiently of them, seeing that for these many yerres they have bin held for the principall dish and daintiest meat that can be served up to the table.” The old Roman was learned in the varieties of the Oyster. Of their different colours, he says: “In Spaine they be reddish, whereas in Sclavonia they be brown and duskish; but about the Cape Circeij, in Italy, their shell and flesh both be blacke;” and then he describes the best kind of Oyster, with all the gusto of a real gourmet. Concerning the best localities for oysters in his time (citing Mutianus as his authority), Pliny says: “The Oysters of Cyzicum, taken about the straits of Callipolis” (was Ancient Pistol thinking of oysters, when he exclaimed, “Feed and be fat, my fair Callipolis?”), “be the fairest of all other, and bigger than those which are bred in Lake Lucrinus, sweeter than those of Brittain, more pleasant to the mouth than the Eudlian, quicker in tast than those of Leptis, fuller than the Lucensian, drier than those of Coryphanta, more tender than the Istrian, and, last of all, whiter than the Oysters of Circeij.”

The luxurious Romans were *passés maitres* in oyster-eating. To a particularly large kind of oyster they gave the significant name of *Tridacna*, for though you must not make two bites of a cherry, or of a native, three were necessary before this species could be consumed. Juvenal

tells of an epicure who knew by the taste the birthplace of every oyster set before him, whether it came from the Circean promontory, from the Lucrine rocks, or from the Rutupinian deeps in Britain. It was the small Lucrine that the poet Martial delighted in, and Seneca, Cicero, Horace, Lucilius, Ausonius, every Roman of note almost, has a good word to say for his favourite oyster. The imperial Dando, Vitellius, seems, like his English prototype, never to have known when to leave off when once he sat down to a good "tuck-in" of oysters: it is on record that he went in for them four times a day (by what process I leave unmentioned), and at each meal swallowed no fewer than a hundred dozen! The Emperor Trajan, too, indulged largely in oysters, and Apicius Caelius is said to have supplied him with fresh ones all the year round, without caring for the month indicated by the canine letter, which was a restriction as much in force with the Romans as amongst ourselves and our epicurean friends across the water. We have, however, on the south-east coast of England, what are called "summer-oysters," which are reckoned a great delicacy.

But it is not only amongst the highly civilised that we find a passion for oysters. The old exploring voyagers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries met with oyster-eaters everywhere. Alvaro Nuflez, who was a prisoner to the Florida Indians, shortly after the discovery of that part of the American continent, speaks of certain flat shores where oysters abounded, "and for three months in the year, they eat no other thing, and drink very bad water. Their houses are made of mats spread upon the shells of oysters, and over them they sleep upon the hides of beasts." Master Richard Jobson, in *Voyage for the Discoverie of Gamboa*, on the coast of Afrika (A.D. 1620), says, that in the river of Sofala "there is good fishing for oysters, which grow on the branches of the trees that hang down into the water;" and in the Observations of William Finch, touching Sierra Leone (in 1607), I find that the people there "feed upon Cockles and Oysters, whereof they have good store growing on the rocks and trees by the sea-side." This adherence of oysters to the drooping branches of the mangrove, whose habitat is the sea-shore, is more fully described a little further on: "There growe likewise within the Bayes, great store of Oysters on Trees, resembling Willows in forme, but the leafe broad and of thickness like leather, bearing small knops like those of the Cypress. From this tree hang downe many branches (eache about the bignes of a good walking sticke), into the water, smooth, lithe, pithy within, overflowne with the tyde, and hanging as thicke of oysters as they can sticke together, being the only fruit the tree beareth, begotten thereof, as it semeth, of the sea-water." A later traveller, Captain Light, bears further testimony to the fondness of the Africans for oysters: "At Galabeshee," he says, in his *Travels in Egypt and Nubia*, "the Nile divided itself among several rocks and uninhabited islands, and here we had

occasion to remark shells of the oyster kind attached to the granite masses of these cataracts, similar to those often found in petrifications, whose presence we attributed to some communication of former times between the Nile and the ocean." Communication, no doubt! That of oyster-caravans, companies of merchants, such as Joseph's brethren met in the Desert. The people of Galabeshee were, in all probability, a community of sable Dandos!

What, however, concerns us most, is not the oyster-eating of the Greeks, the Romans, the Africans, and the inhabitants of the remotest Ind, but the art as practised in our own island and on its adjacent shores. That which the Romans discovered, the inhabitants of the British Isles did not neglect, and our earliest records make mention of Oysters as amongst the chief delicacies of the table, when swans and peacocks added grace and splendour to royal feasts. The oyster-trade of England has been of considerable importance for centuries, and "Oyster Day" was then, as now, one of the great domestic events of the year. "On Saint James's Day" (July 25, old style), says Brande in his *Antiquities*, "oysters come into London, and there is a popular superstition still in force, like that relating to Goose on Michaelmas Day, that whoever eats oysters then will never want money for the rest of the year." It is on this principle, I suppose, that the juvenile grotto-builders always so clamorously desire to be "remembered." That celebration, by the way, in honour of Saint James, the pilgrim-saint par excellence, has reference to the scallop-shell which the Palmer wore in his broad-leaved hat, "when bound for Palestine," but whether St. James himself (he of Compostella is the saint in question) were an oyster-eater or not is more than I can determine.

The most famous localities for Oysters in England, are in the estuaries of the rivers on the shores of Essex, Kent, and Sussex. The best kind of oysters in this country is the small variety called *Natives*; they are found near the mouths of the rivers Colne, Blackwater, and Crouch, in Essex; the Swale and the Medway, in Kent; the Ouse, in Sussex; in Southampton Water; and at other places in all the three kingdoms. So far as regards the London supply, the oysters are brought principally from the Essex coast and rivers; but the Milton, Faversham, and Burnham oysters are most highly esteemed. Some are sent from the north of England; but broods are sent thence to be fattened in the artificial beds. The sale at Billingsgate is enormous.

But England does not monopolise the oyster celebrity of the United Kingdom: Scotland sends from Edinburgh the "Pandores" in which Christopher North and The Shepherd so greatly delighted; and from Ireland come the superb black-bearded "Carlingfords" and the "Powl-doodles of Burran," famous in song. France, too, is a dangerous rival, deriving her most celebrated oysters from Marennes, in the Bay of Biscay, from Cancale, in the Bay of Mont St.

Michel, and from Saint Vaast, Courseul, Etretat, Dieppe, and Tréport, along the Norman coast; Dunkirk and St. Malo also produce good oysters, and presently, as the least known among the various ways of dressing them, I shall give the receipt for that practised at the picturesque old Breton town. The green oyster is peculiar to France, and comes from the coast of Brittany, but both the colour and the flavour of this kind can be produced by putting oysters into pits where the water is almost three feet deep in the salt marshes, and where the sun has great power. In these pits they become green in three or four days, a result proved by M. Borg de St. Vincent to be the effect of light. All oysters are fond of shallows and sequestered nooks, where the waters above them are still and undisturbed by violent winds, and their lives—until the supreme hour arrives when they are wanted for the table—would be tranquil enough were it not for the crabs, which make terrible havoc amongst them when they catch them gaping. Equally fatal to the oyster is sand, but to this danger it is only exposed in "parks," the natural haunt of the oyster being a hard rocky bottom. Michelet, who takes all animals under his protection, thus speaks of the oyster, which he describes (without respect to gender) as its own architect, whose dwelling, he says, is but the continuation of its own mantle of flesh, following its forms and tints. "All that the inert oyster—to which the sea brings nourishment—requires, is a good box with a hinge, which it can open when the hermit wishes to feed, but which it suddenly closes if it fears that it may itself be fed upon by some greedy neighbour. That greedy neighbour, par excellence—near enough now by railway—is the Parisian who refuses to dine without having first offered up, to his own appetite, a sacrifice of oysters. The central dépôt for his necessity—the Paris Billingsgate, in fact—is in the Rue Montorgueil, and a recent calculation shows that, in the year 1860, the market price of the quantity sold amounted to upwards of sixteen hundred and forty-one thousand francs, which, at the rate of four francs and a half the gross, gives a "consummation" of fifty-two millions five hundred and twenty-three thousand four hundred and ninety-six oysters, and the retail sale by the *écalières* was estimated at more than two millions of francs. Of course the Parisians eat more oysters now than ever, but that they were up to their work in this line, a passage from the *Almanack des Gourmands*, of M. Grimod de la Reynière, will convince us: "Let us," he says, "enter the Rue Mandar" (it runs into the Rue Montorgueil), "and we find ourselves hemmed in between two famous rocks, against which are dashed and wrecked every day the purses of the dainty lovers of green and white oysters, we mean the rocks of Cancale and of Etretat. It is there you eat, at all hours, the best oysters in Paris. So prodigious is the quantity consumed, that shortly their shells alone, reaching to the eaves of the highest houses, will themselves become rocks of the

most formidable description." The famous "Rocher de Cancale," I am sorry to say, exists no longer, but en revanche, at Philippe's, at the corner opposite, you may begin the best dinner to be had in Paris with oysters as fine as ever came from Cancale or the Marennes. A propos of these last, they are to be met with, not only at the restaurants of Bordeaux, but at every town of note on the Garonne, as far as it is navigable towards the Pyrenees, and there are few pleasanter things for a traveller to fall in with on board the steam-boats than a bery of the wandering oyster-sellers of La Rochelle. They are a class apart, whom you may at once recognise by their singular square head-dresses and black cloaks with pointed hoods. They come chiefly from La Tremblade and other islands near La Rochelle, and travel in the autumn with oysters and sardines, settling themselves for the season at all the populous places on the great Gascon river, and receiving fresh supplies of their highly-vendible wares about twice or three times a week. They sit at the hotel doors, just as you see them near the restaurants in Paris, but in good looks they far exceed the *écalières* of the capital, and many of them do justice to their loved airs with very beautiful voices. Not only as *ostreophagists*, but as naturalists, the French have devoted themselves to oysters. Buffon, Cuvier, De Blainville, all their great names in science, have gone thoroughly into the history of the captivating mollusc. M. de Lamarck names no fewer than forty-eight different kinds, all of them eatable.

The geographical and gastronomic distribution of the *Ostracea* is well enumerated in a little book specially dedicated to the subject, and recently published by Trübner and Co.

Wherever found, the enormous importance of the Oyster family as the benefactor to Man can never be over-estimated. On the Georgian seaboard of America it actually saves thousands of human beings from a watery death. Dr. Carpenter, in his *Zoology*, tells us that the Oyster plays, amongst its other many parts, the part of a breakwater. "A remarkable growth of them exists along the alluvial shores of Georgia, in North America; and their influence in preventing the encroachments of the sea is very important. The marsh land extends inwards for a space of from twelve to eighteen miles; and it is so soft, that an iron rod might be pushed into it without difficulty to the depth of eighteen or twenty feet. A great number of large creeks and rivers are found meandering through these marshes; and the bends of these rivers would in a short time cut through the adjoining land to such an extent, that the whole seaboard would become a quagmire. But wherever the tide directs its destroying force, its effects are counteracted by walls of living oysters, which grow upon each other from the beds of the rivers to the very verge of the banks."

A few words now about dressing Oysters, though your true *ostreophagist* will not hear of them sophisticated. "Quel est le barbare," ex-

claims one enthusiastic French writer, "qui mange des huîtres cuites? si l'on en excepte les matelottes Normandes;" and yet there are almost as many ways of preparing oysters as of arranging eggs. Grimod de la Reynière gives a list, in which he includes: "À la bonne femme"—"à la daube"—"au Parmesan"—"en casserole"—"au hachis"—"en paille"—"farcies"—"frites"—"sautées"—"grillées"—"en papillotes"—"en caisse"—"en ragout"—"au gras," and "au maigre;" and a pretty sort of *maigre* that must be at which well-fed oysters assist. Not to make a cookery-book of this article, but to redeem a promise, I will give the Breton way of dressing what M. de Cussy so justly calls "ces truffes de la mer:" "Having selected some oysters of the largest size, drain off the liquor in a fine cloth, and when dry dredge them lightly with flour. Then cut up two or three large onions very small, put in a saucepan a bit of butter, and when it melts throw in your onions. After they have been there two or three minutes add the oysters, and simmer them gently, seasoning with pepper and salt as they are in progress. When slightly browned, take them off the fire, suffer a few drops of vinegar to moisten them, and then—"do your worst, as Duguesclin, or the Constable De Clisson, or any other famous Breton warrior may (or may not) have done. Nicolo, the composer, had a way of "accommodating" oysters, in the society of a few other good things, which is worth citing. He passed his life between his piano and his saucepans, and prepared his macaroni after this fashion: He filled each pipe with beef marrow, goose-liver, shreds of game and truffles, and minced oysters, moistened well with their own juice. Of this dish he always ate with one hand over his eyes, that his meditations might not be disturbed.

We all know how to eat oyster patties, but it is not every one who has culinary knowledge sufficient to declare how they should be made. Here, therefore, is a final receipt: With plenty of cream let veal sweetbreads divide the honour with succulent shell-fish, giving an equal portion of each, and sprinkling sliced truffles over the compound before you fill your paste. I refrain from saying more.

Bachelors in chambers are sometimes advised to cheer their loneliness by roasting their oysters; but the most original receipt for that dish can only be put in practice on the alluvial shores of Georgia. There oysters cling together in great clusters among the long grass that springs out of the rich soil. The neighbouring inhabitants sometimes light a fire upon the marsh-grass, roll a huge bunch of oysters upon it, and revel in a barbaric oyster-feast.

No bounds appear ever to have been fixed to the human appetite for oysters. Even the fair sex, as yet free from the obnoxious attentions of man and leading virgin lives, may be tempted to try conclusions with their appetites when oysters are in question. I have their own authority for stating that two spinsters of my acquaintance, one night after returning

from the theatre, disposed at supper of a whole barrel of natives, containing some eight or ten dozen, by placing them between the bars; and this in the teeth of the fact that they had already dined on scolloped oysters. This latter circumstance might, perhaps, have whetted them to the deed, or they thought with Macbeth, that, once in for it, "returning were as tedious as go on." At all events, the ten dozen disappeared. But then came shame and remorse. Only half the number of shells were left on the dish, the rest, carefully stowed away in the barrel, as if they had been real oysters, were set aside. On the following day came the self-imposed penance for their gourmandise: the barrel was brought out again, and a Barmecide banquet followed; the remainder of the shells being scattered about the table as if recently emptied, and as if one result of *two* performances. I am pleased to say that both these oyster-loving, self-denying young women are happily married, and if they still eat roasted oysters it is certain evidence that despised bachelors, now their husbands, who have the pleasure, like the cat in the fable, of withdrawing the oysters from between the bars.

But one might discourse about oysters for ever; the pearl variety alone (*Avicula margaritum*) would furnish a theme for an epic poem, therefore let me conclude with this observation: The fact is indisputable, that, from the earliest period of antiquity down to the present time, the oyster has enjoyed a reputation which it has maintained through the lapse of ages and the fall of empires: time itself has been unable to destroy that reputation, because whatever is really useful and beneficial to humanity cannot fail to be eternally venerated.

A DAY'S RIDE: A LIFE'S ROMANCE.

CHAPTER XLV.

I WAS now bound for the first port in the Mediterranean from which I could take ship for Malta; and the better to carry out my purpose, I resolved never to make acquaintance with any one, or be seduced by any companionship, till I had seen Miss Herbert, and given her the message I was charged with. This time, at least, I would be a faithful envoy, at least as faithful as a man might be who had gone to sleep over his credentials for a twelvemonth. And so I reached Maltz, and took my place by diligence over the Stelvio down to Lecco, never trusting myself with even the very briefest intercourse with my fellow-travellers, and suffering them to indulge in the humblest estimate of me, morally and intellectually—all that I might be true to my object and firm to my fixed purpose. For the first time in my life I tried to present myself in an unfavourable aspect, and I was astonished to find the experiment by no means displeasing, the reason being, probably, that it was an eminent success. I began to see how the surly people are such acute philosophers in life, and what a deal of selfish gratification they must derive from their uncurbed ill humour. I reached Genoa in time to catch a steamer for Malta. It was crowded,

and with what, in another mood, I might have called pleasant people; but I held myself estranged and aloof from all. I could mark many an impertinent allusion to my cold and distant manner, and could see that a young sub on his way to join was even witty at the expense of my retiring disposition. The creature, Groves he was called, used to try to "trot me out," as he phrased it; but I maintained both my resolve and my temper, and gave him no triumph.

I was almost sorry on the morning we dropped anchor in the harbour. The sense of doing something, anything, with a firm persistence had given me cheerfulness and courage. However, I had now a task of some nicety before me, and addressed myself at once to its discharge. At the hotel I learned that the cottage inhabited by Mrs. Keats was in a small nook of one of the bays, and only an easy walk from the town; and so I despatched a messenger at once with Miss Crofton's note to Miss Herbert, enclosed in a short one from myself, to know if she would permit me to wait upon her, with reference to the matter in the letter. I spoke of myself in the third person and as the bearer of the letter.

While I was turning over the letters and papers in my writing-desk, awaiting her reply, I came upon Buller's note to his brother, and, without any precise idea why, I sent it by a servant to the Government House, with my card. It was completely without a purpose that I did so, and if my reader has not experienced moments of the like "inconsequence," I should totally break down in attempting to account for their meaning.

Miss Herbert's reply came back promptly. She requested that the writer of the note she had just read would favour her with a visit at his earliest convenience.

I set forth immediately. What a strange and thrilling sensation it is when we take up some long-dropped link in life, go back to some broken thread of our existence, and try to attach it to the present! We feel young again in the bygone, and yet far older even than our real age in the thought of the changes time has wrought upon us in the mean while. A week or so before I had looked with impatience for this meeting, and now I grew very fainthearted as the moment drew nigh. The only way I could summon courage for the occasion was by thinking that in the mission entrusted to me I was actually nothing. There were incidents and events not one of which touched me, and I should pass away off the scene when our interview was over, and be no more remembered by her.

It was evident that the communication had engaged her attention to some extent by the promptitude of her message to me; and with this thought I crossed the little lawn, and rang the bell at the door.

"The gentleman expected by Miss Herbert, sir?" asked a smart English maid. "Come this way, sir. She will see you in a few minutes."

I had fully ten minutes to inspect the details of a pretty little drawing-room, one of those little female temples where scattered drawings and books and music, and, above all, the delicious odour of fresh flowers, all harmonise together, and set you a thinking how easily life could glide by with such appliances were they only set in motion by the touch of the enchantress herself. The door opened at last, but it was the maid; she came to say that Mrs. Keats was very poorly that day, and Miss Herbert could not leave her at that moment; and if it were not perfectly convenient to the gentleman to wait, she begged to know when it would suit him to call again?

"As for me," said I, "I have come to Malta solely on this matter; pray say that I will wait as long as she wishes. I am completely at her orders."

I strolled out after this through one of the windows that opened on the lawn, and gaining the sea-side, I sat down upon a rock to bide her coming. I might have sat about half an hour thus, when I heard a rapid step approaching, and I had just time to arise when Miss Herbert stood before me. She started back, and grew pale, very pale, as she recognised me, and for fully a minute there we both stood, unable to speak a word.

"Am I to understand, sir," said she, at last, "that you are the bearer of this letter?" And she held it open towards me.

"Yes," said I, with a great effort at collectedness. "I have much to ask your forgiveness for. It is fully a year since I was charged to place that in your hands, but one mischance after another has befallen me; not to own that in my own purposeless mode of life I have had no enemy worse than my fate."

"I have heard something of your fondness for adventure," said she, with a strange smile that blended a sort of pity with a gentle irony. "After we parted company at Schaffhausen, I believe you travelled for some time on foot? We heard, at least, that you took a fancy to explore a mode of life few persons have penetrated, or, at least, few of your rank and condition."

"May I ask, what do you believe that rank and condition to be, Miss Herbert?" asked I, firmly.

She blushed deeply at this; perhaps I was too abrupt in the way I spoke, and I hastened to add,

"When I offered to be the bearer of the letter you have just read, I was moved by another wish than merely to render you some service. I wanted to tell you, once for all, that if I lived for a while in a fiction land of my own invention, with day-dreams and fancies, and hopes and ambitions all unreal, I have come to pay the due penalty of my deceit, and confess that nothing can be more humble than I am in birth, station, or fortune—my father an apothecary, my name Potts, my means a very few pounds in the world; and yet, with all that avowed, I feel prouder now that I have made it, than ever I did in the false assumption of some condition I had no claim to."

She held out her hand to me with such a significant air of approval, and smiled so good-naturedly, that I could not help pressing it to my lips, and kissing it rapturously.

Taking a seat at my side, and with a voice meant to recal me to a quiet and business-like demeanour, she asked me to read over Miss Crofton's letter. I told her that I knew every line of it by heart, and, more still, I knew the whole story to which it related. It was a topic that required the nicest delicacy to touch on, but with a frankness that charmed me, she said,

"You have had the candour to tell me freely your story; let me imitate you, and reveal mine.

"You know who we are, and whence we have sprung: that my father was a simple labourer on a line of railroad, and by dint of zeal and intelligence, and an energy that would not be balked or impeded, that he raised himself to station and affluence. You have heard of his connexion with Sir Elkanah Crofton, and how unfortunately it was broken off; but you cannot know the rest; that is, you cannot know what we alone know, and what is not so much as suspected by others; and of this I can scarcely dare to speak, since it is essentially the secret of my family."

I guessed at once to what she alluded; her troubled manner, her swimming eyes, and her quivering voice, all betrayed that she referred to the mystery of her father's fate: while I doubted within myself whether it were right and fitting for me to acknowledge that I knew the secret source of her anxiety. She relieved me from my embarrassment by continuing thus:

"Your kind and generous friends have not suffered themselves to be discouraged by defeat. They have again and again renewed their proposals to my mother, only varying the mode, in the hope that by some stratagem they might overcome her reasons for refusal. Now, though this rejection, so persistent as it is, may seem ungracious, it is not without a sufficient and substantial cause."

Again she faltered, and grew confused, and now I saw how she struggled between a natural reserve and an impulse to confide the sorrow that oppressed her to one who might befriend her.

"You may speak freely to me," said I, at last. "I am not ignorant of the mystery you hint at. Crofton has told me what many surmise and some freely believe in."

"But we know it, know it for a certainty," cried she, clasping my hand in her eagerness. "It is no longer a surmise or a suspicion. It is a certainty—a fact! Two letters in his handwriting have reached my mother; one from St. Louis in America, where he had gone first; the second from an Alpine village, where he was laid up in sickness. He had had a terrible encounter with a man who had done him some gross wrong, and he was wounded in the shoulder. After which he had to cross the Rhine, wading or swimming, and travel many miles ere he could find shelter. When he wrote, however, he was rapidly recovering, and as quickly regaining all his old courage and daring."

"And from that time forward have you had no tidings of him?"

"Nothing but a cheque on a Russian banker in London to pay to my mother's order a sum of money, a considerable one too; and although she hoped to gain some clue to him through this, she could not succeed, nor have we now any trace of him whatever. I ought to mention," said she, as if catching up a forgotten thread in her narrative, "that in his last letter he enjoined my mother not to receive any payment from the assurance company, nor enter into compromise with them; and, above all, to live in the hope that we should meet again and be happy."

"And are you still ignorant of where he now is?"

"We only know that a cousin of mine, an officer of engineers at Aden, heard of an Englishman being engaged by the Shah of Persia to report on certain silver mines at Kashan, and from all he could learn the description would apply to him. My cousin had obtained leave of absence expressly to trace him, and promised in his last letter to bring me himself any tidings he might procure here to Malta. Indeed, when I learned that a stranger had asked to see me, I was full sure it was my cousin Harry."

Was it that her eyes grew darker in colour as this name escaped her—was it that a certain tremor shook her voice—or was it the anxiety of my own jealous humour, that made me wretched as I heard of that cousin Harry, now mentioned for the first time?

"What reparation can I make you for so blank a disappointment?" said I, with a sad half-bitter tone.

"Be the same kind friend that he would have proved himself if it had been his fortune to come first," said she; and though she spoke calmly, she blushed deeply. "Here," said she, hurriedly, taking a small printed paragraph from a letter, and eagerly, as it seemed, trying to recover her former manner—"here is a slip I have cut out of the *Levant Herald*. I found it about two months since. It ran thus: 'The person who had contracted for the works at Pera, and who now turns out to be an Englishman, is reported to have had a violent altercation yesterday with Musted Pasha, in consequence of which he has thrown up his contract and demanded his passport for Russia. It is rumoured here that the Russian ambassador is no stranger to this rupture.' Vague as this is, I feel persuaded that he is the person alluded to, and that it is from Constantinople we must trace him."

"Well," cried I, "I am ready. I will set out at once."

"Oh! can I believe you will do us this great service?" cried she, with swimming eyes and clasped hands.

"This time you will find me faithful," said I, gravely. "He who has said and done so many foolish things as I have, must, by one good action, give bail for his future character."

"You are a true friend, and you have all my confidence."

"Mrs. Keats's compliments, miss," said the maid, at this moment, "and hopes the gentleman will stay to dinner with you, though she cannot come down herself."

"She imagines you are my cousin, whom she is aware I have been expecting," said Miss Herbert, in a whisper, and evidently appearing uncertain how to act.

"Oh!" said I, with an anguish I could not repress, "would that I could change my lot with his."

"Very well, Mary," said Miss Herbert; "thank your mistress from me, and say the gentleman accepts her invitation with pleasure. Is it too much presumption on my part, sir, to say so?" said she, with a low whisper, while a half malicious twinkle lit up her eyes, and I could not speak with happiness.

Determined, however, to give an earnest of my zeal in her cause, I declared I would at once return to the town, and learn when the first packet sailed for Constantinople. The dinner hour was seven, so that I had fully five hours yet to make my inquiries ere we met at table. I wondered at myself how business-like and practical I had become; but a strong purpose now impelled me, and seemed to add a sort of strength to my whole nature.

"As cousin Harry is the mirror of punctuality, and you now represent him, Mr. Potts," said she, shaking my hand, "pray remember not to be later than seven."

CHAPTER XLVI.

"CONSTANTINOPLE, ODESSA, and the LEVANT.—The Cyclops, five hundred horse-power, to sail on Wednesday morning, at eight o'clock. For freight or passage apply to Captain Robert B. Rogers."

This announcement, which I found amidst a great many others in a frame over the fireplace in the coffee-room, struck me forcibly, first of all, because, not belonging to the regular mail packets, it suggested a cheap passage; and, secondly, it promised an early departure, and the vessel was to sail on the very next morning, an amount of promptitude that I felt would gratify Miss Herbert.

Now, although I had been living for a considerable time back at the cost of the Imperial House of Hapsburg, my resources for such an expedition as was opening before me were of the most slender kind. I made a careful examination of all my worldly wealth, and it amounted to the sum of forty-three pounds some odd shillings. On terra firma I could of course economise to any extent. With self-denial and resolution I could live on very little. Life in the East, I had often heard, was singularly cheap and inexpensive. All I had read of Oriental habits in the Arabian Nights and Tales of the Genii assured me that with a few dates and a water-melon a man dined fully as well as need be; and the delicious warmth of the climate rendered shelter a complete superfluity. Before forming anything like a correct budget, I must ascertain what would be the

cost of my passage to Constantinople, and so I rang for the waiter to direct me to the address of the advertiser.

"That's the captain yonder, sir," whispered the waiter, and he pointed to a stout, weather-beaten man, who, with his hands in the pockets of his pilot-coat, was standing in front of the fire, smoking a cigar.

Although I had never seen him before, the features reminded me of some one I had met with, and suddenly I bethought me of the skipper with whom I had sailed from Ireland for Milford, and who had given me a letter for his brother "Bob"—the very Robert Rogers now before me.

"Do you know this handwriting, captain?" said I, drawing the letter from my pocket-book.

"That's my brother Joe's," said he, not offering to take the letter from my hand, or removing the cigar from his mouth, but talking with all the unconcern in life. "That's Joe's own scrawl, and there ain't a worse from this to himself."

"The letter is for you," said I, rather offended at his coolness.

"So I see. Stick it up there, over the chimney; Joe has never anything to say that won't keep."

"It is a letter of introduction, sir," said I, still more haughtily.

"And what if it be? Won't that keep? Who is it to introduce?"

"The humble individual before you, Captain Rogers."

"So, that's it!" said he, slowly. "Well, read it out for me, for, to tell you the truth, there's no harder navigation to me than one of Joe's scrawls."

"I believe I can master it," said I, opening and reading what originally had been composed and drawn up by myself. When I came to "Algernon Sydney Potts, a man so completely after your own heart," he drew his cigar from his mouth, and laying his hand on my shoulder, turned me slowly around till the light fell full upon me.

"No, Joseph," said he, deliberately, "not a bit of it, my boy. This ain't my sort of chap at all!"

I almost choked with anger, but somehow there was such an apparent earnestness in the man, and such a total absence of all wish to offend, that I read on to the end.

"Well," said he, as I concluded, "he usedn't to be so wordy as that. I wonder what came over him. Mayhap he wasn't well."

What a comment on a style that might have adorned the Correct Letter Writer!

"He was, on the contrary, in the enjoyment of perfect health, sir," said I, tartly.

"All I can pick out of it is, I ain't to offer you any money; and as there isn't any direction easier to follow, nor pleasanter to obey, here's my hand!" And he wrung mine with a grip that would have flattened a chain cable.

"What's your line, here? You ain't sodgering, are you?"

"No; I'm travelling, for pleasure, for information, for pastime, as one might say."

"In the general do-nothing and careless line of business? That ain't mine. No, by jingo! I don't eat my fish without catching, ay, and salting them, too, I ain't ashamed to say. I'm captain, supercargo, and pilot of my own craft; take every lunar that is taken aboard; I've writ every line that ever is writ in the log-book, and I vaccinated every man and boy aboard for the natural small-pox with these fingers and this tool that you see here!" And he produced an old and very rusty instrument of veterinary surgery from his vest-pocket, where it lay with copper money, tobacco quids, and lucifer matches.

I quickly remembered the character for inordinate boastfulness his brother had given me, and of which he thus, without any provocation on my part, afforded me a slight specimen. Now perhaps at this last stage of my narrative, I might never have alluded to him at all, if it were not for the opportunity it gives me of recording how nobly and how resolutely I resisted what may be called the most trying temptation of human nature. An inveterate dram-drinker has been known to turn away from the proffered glass; an incurable gambler has been seen to decline the invitation to "cut in;" dignitaries of the Church have begged off being made bishops; but is there any mention in history of an anecdote-monger suffering himself to be patiently vanquished, and retiring from the field without firing off at least an "incident that occurred to himself?" If ever a man was sorely tried, I was. Here was this coarsely-minded vulgar dog, with nothing pictorial nor imaginative in his nature, heaping story upon story of his own feats and achievements, in which not one solitary situation ever suggested an interest or awakened an anxiety; and I, who could have shot my tigers, crippled my leopards, hamstringed my lionesses, rescued men from drowning, and women from fire—with little life touches to thrill the heart and force tears from the eyes of a stockbroker—I, I say, had to stand there and listen in silence! Watching a creature banging away at a target that he never hit, with an old flint musket, while you held in your hand a short Enfield that would have driven the ball through the bull's-eye is nothing to this; and to tell the truth, it nearly choked me. Twice I had to cough down the words, "Now let me mention a personal fact." But I did succeed, and I am proud to say I only grew very red in the face, and felt that singing in the ears and general state of muddle that forebodes a fit. But I rallied, and said in a voice slow, from the dignity of a self-conquest,

"Can you take me as a passenger to Constantinople?"

"To Constantinople? Ay, to the Persian Gulf, to Point de Galle, to Cochin China, to Ross River; don't think to puzzle me with navigation, my lad."

"Are there many other passengers?"

"I could have five hundred, if I'd take 'em! Put Bob Rogers on a placard, and see what'll

happen! If I said, 'I'm agoing to sea on a plank to-morrow,' there's men would rather come along with me than go in the Queen, or the Hannibal. I don't say they're right, mind ye; but I won't say they're wrong, neither."

"Oh, why didn't I meet this wretch when I was a child? Why didn't my father find a Helot like this, to tell lies before me, and frighten me with their horrid ugliness?" This was the thought that flashed through me as I listened. I felt, besides, that such stupid, purposeless inventions, corrupted and blunted the taste for graceful narrative, just in the same way that an undeserving recipient of charity offends the pleasure of real benevolence.

"May I ask, Captain Rogers, what is the fare?" said I, with a bland courtesy.

"That depends upon the man, sir. If you was Ram-sam Can-tanker-abad, I'd say five hundred gold pagodas. If you was a Cockney stripling, with a fresh-water face and a spun-yarn whisker, I'd call it a matter of seven or eight pound."

"And you sail at eight?"

"To the minute. When Bob Rogers says eight o'clock, the first turn of the paddles will be with the first stroke of the hour."

"Then book me, pray, for a berth; and, for surety's sake, I'll go aboard to-night."

"Meet me, then, here at ten o'clock, and I'll take you off in my gig, an honour to be proud on, my lad; but as Joe's friend, I'll do it."

I bowed my acknowledgments and went off, neither delighted with my new acquaintance, nor myself for the patience I had shown him. After all, I had secured an early passage, and thus was able to show Kate Herbert that I was not going to let the grass grow under my feet this time, and that she might reckon on my zeal to serve her in future. As I retraced my road to the cottage, I forgot all about Captain Rogers, and only thought of Kate, and the interests that were hers. It was next to a certainty that her father was yet alive; but how to find him in a strange land, with a feigned name, and most probably with every aid and appliance to complete his disguise! It was, doubtless, a noble enterprise to devote oneself for such as she was, but not very hopeful withal; and then I went over various plans for my future guidance: what I should do if I fell sick? what if my money failed me? what if I were waylaid by Arabs, or carried away to some fearful region in the mountains, and made to feed a pet alligator or a domestic boa-constrictor? I hoped sincerely that I was over-estimating my possible perils, but it was wise to give a large margin to the unknown; and so I did not curb myself in the least.

As I entered the grounds, the night was falling, and I could see that the lamps were already lighted in the drawing-room. What surprised me, however, was to see a very smart groom, well mounted, and leading another horse up and down before the door. There was evidently a visitor within, and I felt indisposed to enter till he had gone away. My curiosity, however,

prompted me to ask the groom the name of his master, and he replied, "The Honourable Captain Buller."

The very essence of all jealousy is, that it is unreasoning. It is well known that husbands— that much-believing and much-belied class— always suspect every one but the right man; and now, without the faintest clue to a suspicion, I grew actually sick with jealousy!

Nor was it altogether blamable in me, for as I looked through the uncurtained window, I could see the captain, a fine-looking, rather tigerish sort of fellow, standing with his back to the fireplace, while he talked to Miss Herbert, who sat some distance off at a work-table. There was in his air that amount of jaunty ease and self-possession that said, "I'm at home here; in this fortress I hold the chief command." There was about him, too, the tone of an assumed superiority, which, when displayed by a man towards a woman, takes the most offensive of all possible aspects.

As he talked, he moved at last towards a window, and, opening it, held out his hand to feel if it were raining.

"I hope," cried he, "you'll not send me back with a refusal; her ladyship counts upon you as the chief ornament of her ball."

"We never do go to balls, sir," was the dry response.

"But make this occasion the exception. If you only knew how lamentably we are off for pretty people, you'd pity us. Such garrison wives and daughters are unknown to the oldest inhabitant of the island. Surely Mrs. Keats will be quite well by Wednesday, and she'll not be so cruel as to deny you to us for this once."

"I can but repeat my excuses—I never go out."

"If you say so, I think I'll abandon all share in the enterprise. It was a point of honour with me to persuade you; in fact, I pledged myself to succeed, and if you really persist in a refusal, I'll just pitch all these notes in the fire, and go off yachting till the whole thing is over." And with this he drew forth a mass of notes from his sabretasche, and proceeded to con over the addresses: "'Mrs. Hilyard,' 'Mr. Barnes,' 'Mr. Clintosh,' 'Lady Blagden.' Oh, Lady Blagden! Why it would be worth while coming only to see her and Sir John; and here are the Crosbys, too; and what have we here? Oh! this is a note from Grey. You don't know my brother Grey—he'd amuse you immensely. Just listen to this, by way of a letter of introduction:

"DEAR GEORGE,—Cherish the cove that will hand you this note as the most sublime Snob I have ever met in all my home and foreign experiences. In a large garrison like yours, you can have no difficulty in finding fellows to give him a field-day. I commit him, therefore, to your worthy keeping, to dine him, draw him forth, and pitch him out of the window when you've done with him. No harm if it is from the

topmost story of the highest barrack in Malta. His name is Potts—seriously and truthfully, Potts. Birth, parentage, and belongings all unknown to, "Yours ever,

"GREY BULLER."

"You are unfortunate, sir, in confiding your correspondence to me," said Kate, rising from her seat, "for that gentleman is a friend, a sincere and valued friend, of my own, and you could scarcely have found a more certain way to offend me than to speak of him slightly."

"You can't mean that you know him—ever met him?"

"I know him and respect him, and I will not listen to one word to his disparagement. Nay, more, sir, I will feel myself at liberty, if I think it fitting, to tell Mr. Potts the honourable mode in which your brother has discharged the task of an introduction, its good faith, and gentlemanlike feeling."

"Pray let us have him at the mess first. Don't spoil our sport till we have at least one evening out of him."

But she did not wait for him to finish his speech, and left the room.

It is but fair to own he took his reverses with great coolness: he tightened his sword-belt, set his cap on his head before the glass, stroked down his moustache, and then lighting a cigar, swaggered off to the door with the lounging swing of his order.

As for myself, I hastened back to the town, and with such speed that I traversed the mile in something like thirteen minutes. I had no very clear or collected plan of action, but I resolved to ask Captain Rogers to be my friend, and see me through this conjuncture. He had just dined as I entered the coffee-room, and consented to have his brandy-and-water removed to my bedroom while I opened my business with him.

I will not, at this eleventh hour of revelations, inflict upon my reader the details, but simply be satisfied to state that I found the skipper far more practical than I looked for. He evidently, besides, had a taste for these sort of adventures, and prided himself on his conduct of them. "Go back now, and eat your dinner comfortably with your friends; leave everything to me, and I promise you one thing—the Cyclops shall not get full steam up till we have settled this small transaction."

MR. CHARLES DICKENS

Will read on FRIDAY EVENING, March 22nd, at St. James's Hall, Piccadilly, his Story of

LITTLE DOMBEY AND THE TRIAL FROM PICKWICK.

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